

1608/4810.

DEISM

Not consistent with the

Religion of REASON and NATURE:

Wherein are obviated

The most popular OBJECTIONS brought
against Christianity, those especially which
are urged by a *Moral Philosopher*, in a
late extraordinary Pamphlet, stiled, *Deism*
fairly stated, and fully vindicated.

In a LETTER to a FRIEND.

Χρη δε προς θεον εκ παλιν.

PINDAR.



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ERRATA:

PAGE 2. line 9. for *especially*, read *specially*.

Page 20. line 23. for *peculiar oblations*, read *piacular oblations*.

Page 31. line 2. for *unvaried*, read *invaried*.

Page 53. line 8. after the words *that cup*, dele *alas!*

Page 54. line 24. to the words *with what consistent goodness*
add *the connective particle, then*

Page 84. line 3. for *what it*, read *what is*.

Page 66. line 21. for *discharged* read *destroyed*.

Page 60 for *reflect alike Happiness & glory to the Creator & all his creatures read—reflect glory to the Creator & Happiness to all his creatures.*



DEAR SIR,

WHEN last I had the favour of a visit from you, you was pleased, in the warmth of an oft revived dispute, and the overflowings of your zeal for a cause far more modish, perhaps, than either meritorious, manly, or even modest, to recommend to my perusal a pamphlet stiled *Deism fairly stated, and fully vindicated*; which, as it exhibits a train of thinking, in your opinion, unanswerably conclusive on that head, I therefore perused with all the care and attention I was master of, and with the same impartiality too, that I would wish the following pages to meet with from you.

From the apparent drift of almost every passage throughout the piece, as well as from the particulars usually implied in the term *Deism*, I am sufficiently authorised, I presume, to infer, that an exclusion of revelation in general, the gospel dispensation more especially, is its peculiar distinguishing characteristic;

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raſterific ; and, notwithstanding any outward diſguiſes he may think fit occaſionally to put on, that our author is inwardly, and from his ſoul a confirmed enemy to the goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt. For, beſides repreſenting all its doctrines in the moſt abſurd and unfavourable light he can, he in expreſs terms declares, that “ it is greatly improbable, that God ſhould eſpecially interpoſe “ to acquaint the world with what mankind “ would do altogether as well without (*p.35*):” and that “ if it was proper to be done with “ reſpect to ſome, it was proper to be done “ to all: but it has not been done to all, “ therefore it has not been done to any “ (*p.94*).”

But whatever ſucceſs he may have met with from his ſcattered poiſon, towards corrupting the unguarded principles of ſome, I have yet the pleaſure and pride to inform you, that it failed having any baneful influence on *me*. His every artifice, by which he would make men nauſeate (excuse for once the unfashionable gravity of ſcripture metaphor) the delicious cup of ſalvation, ſerves rather to give me a higher and more exquisite reliſh for it: and whiſt he ſtudiouſly labours to confound, he unwarily confirms every evidence of authority which revelation makes pretenſions to. And this, in fact,



fact, is the case with the generality of writers of that complexion. They then most effectually serve the cause, when they are most vehement in exposing, what they call, the craft of christianity ----*sæpe depressa veritas emergit, magna est, -----et prævalebit.* A circumstance which one would think must mortify, not a little, the pride and overbearing spirit of infidelity, however ineffectual it may be towards mollifying its inveterate obdurate rage and malice. But not to consider you in the light of one so irretrievably attached to the cause of deism, so fatally enlisted under its delusive banner, as that you dare not even meditate a recovery of those rationally-restrained freedoms of a christian, idly exchanged for the licentious unnatural roving of an infidel, the few following observations will, if perhaps they may disappoint your present expectations, be instrumental, I hope, notwithstanding, to your real satisfaction in the end. And I must be so free to confess, that, but for the great importance of the subject in debate, and the hoped-for conversion of a misguided friend, I had passed through the fancied reasonings of your author, with only bestowing on them that silent contempt which is all the regard due to such arrogant self-sufficient railing. For tho', from the fluctuating unset-

tled principles of some, and the too deeply ingrafted prejudices of others, he has made shift to pick up some kind of reputation as a reasoner; yet I scarce can name one so entirely undeserving such applause, unless it be in fact any real merit in an author to play off upon his readers all the mean arts of sophistry and chicane, his ingenuity will furnish him with, and then gravely substitute them in the room of reason and real argument.

It would be sufficient, I imagined, if I replied to his objections, trite and hackneyed as they are, by arguments in general *as* trite. Nor must you wonder, therefore, if in the course of these remarks, you meet with few other than meer common observations, such as might be supposed immediately to occur to me upon my first perusal of the pamphlet: If any of them shall happen to appear in a light somewhat new, and more striking than elsewhere, it is all I can wish for or expect: not doubting, but that the principal cavils here observed upon, have at different times been refuted, to the satisfaction of all, but those who are determined—not to be convinced.

Thus much by way of introduction,-----
proceed we now to the remarks.

“ Being seriously disposed to re-examine
“ the motives to what he, with too much
“ propriety

“ propriety, calls his own exploded senti-
 “ ments, and the justness of those reason-
 “ ings upon which they were grounded,” (our
 author tells us,) “ that he applied himself in
 “ the most impartial manner, to the reading
 “ such christian writers as had obtained the
 “ greatest reputation for sound judgment
 “ and nervous reasoning (*p. 2*).”

A resolution, this, truly noble, just, and
 generous ; well suited to the pretensions of a
 free thinker and a free enquirer ; and what
 ought invariably to be the imitation of those
 who mean to engage in a serious and honest
 defence of truth ! But what pity it is that
 our author does not appear to be the man
 that ever concerted in his mind, or, if he
 did, chose to reduce to practice, a resolution
 so becoming ! For if that had been the case,
 we surely should have met with a few ex-
 tracts from those men of sound judgment
 and nervous reasoning.----Your *Medes*, your
Hammonds, and *Scots* ; your *Sharps*, *Souths*,
 and *Tillotsons* ; your *Lockes*, *Addisons*, and
Newtons.----Men whose very names would
 have added weight and dignity to our au-
 thor's cause,---could he have been so fortu-
 nate as to have engaged them in its defence ;
 the remarkable want of which, in that par-
 ticular, gives a proportionally strong intima-

tion in its disfavour. And I would only desire you, to point me out one, from among them all, to whom he has dared to make a regular appeal; will you wonder then, if at last he complains, that he has "not found" "whereon to rest the sole of his foot (*p. 3*)?" Alas! these were men that might have afforded him the rest he pretends to have sought for;---but not in fact the rest and satisfaction he desired, *viz.* an authority for his infidelity. It was, therefore, more to his purpose, to be silent upon these, of all others, the least exceptionable advocates for christianity, and to draw all his conclusions from such as were more so. For tho' I cannot, in the number of exceptionables, include that whole triumvirate which our author introduces with a kind of insolent contempt, *viz.* the *Waterlands*, the *W-rb-ns*, the *Stebbings* (1); (the last of these appearing evidently in a light that reflects equal credit to himself and to christianity;) yet may I, perhaps, be justified in observing of the two first, that, if the one, out of that vast treasure of learning, abilities, and social virtues, in which he was equalled but by

(1) Charging them, not only with the want of decency and modesty in their writings, but with the use of scurrility and sophistry, in the room of reason and judgment (*p. 10*).

few, excelled perhaps by none, suffered in any of his writings, his zeal to get some kind of ascendancy over his better judgment; the other may be said to have wrote most usually with but a bare confident pretence to the former, without observing any the least regard whatsoever to the latter.--- Witness among numberless instances of unfair behaviour of the like kind, that most extraordinary one laid to his charge by his antagonist, the very worthy and ingenious Dr. S---ks (2); not to mention, that

(2) " Dr. Sykes having by letter recommended to Mr. W---n's consideration, some points relative to that absurd hypothesis on which the latter builds the divine legation of *Moses*, expressed at the same time his wishes, that he (Mr. W---n) would write in the spirit of one that seeks truth, and in a manner that every good man wishes.—Could any one imagine, that the meaning of these words was, that Dr. Sykes had desired him to be tender of his bad logic, and worse criticism; and that he would overlook his ill expressions, and find out his meaning, if he could? Yet this he pretends was Dr. Sykes's meaning. And again, when Dr. Sykes had told him, that if he gave him the satisfaction he wanted, he should find, in him, a mind open to conviction.—This he construes, he should find in him a man who had been often *convicted*. Is this perversion of words (asks Dr. Sykes with much propriety) consistent with moral honesty? Is this the man that pretends to believe a divine legation in *Moses*, or in any one else, thus knowingly and wilfully to pervert any one's meaning?" [Vide Dr. Sykes's defence of the examination of Mr. Warburton's account of the theocracy of the *Jews*, p. 4. 5. 32. 33.] And I will add, shall not any one be cleared of the imputation of slander and invective, who takes upon him to expose the shameless conduct of a wretch, who dares to be so dishonest?

late general contempt he has brought upon himself as an editor, critic, and legatee. Be that however as it may, has our author no stronger motives to his infidelity, or we to our faith, than what arise from some picked, presumptive indiscretions of a few?

But what after all are the weak and erroneous sentiments laid to their charge? Why Dr. *Waterland* (who it seems is to be the scape goat for the iniquities of all the rest) Dr. *Waterland* has this remarkable sentence---
 “ What atheism chiefly aims at, is to fit loose
 “ from present restraints and future reckon-
 “ ings; and these two purposes, says he,
 “ may be completely answered by deism,
 “ which is a more refined kind of atheism.
 “ Which astonishing assertion, as he calls
 “ it, our author endeavours to refute by ex-
 “ hibiting a few fundamental credenda of a
 “ deist’---Such as the belief of a God---a fu-
 “ ture state of rewards and punishments, &c.---
 “ Which, says he, “ plainly prove that deism
 “ is just as diametrically opposite to atheism
 “ as the very believing is to the absolute
 “ disbelief of the existence of a God. For
 “ says he, deism properly so called, what-
 “ ever ill usage it may have met with is no
 “ other than the religion essential to Man,
 “ the true original *religion of reason and na-*
 “ *ture*; such as was believed and practised
 “ by *Socrates* and those of old, who were
 “ as

“ as great ornaments, and did as much honour to human nature as any christian ever did.” p. 5.

The religion of reason and nature supposes, as I apprehend, an acquiescence in, or conformity to, as well all extraordinary intimations of our duty, as what are the ordinary and usual deductions from right reason and conscience---so that it may and must comprehend not only the observance of such kind of rules, as *Socrates*, &c. taught, but also an additional esteem and practice of precepts delivered by a substituted guide from heaven, when such an one shall appear to be sent into the world. Wherefore if to deism our author unites not a distinct belief of and regard to revelation (*quatenus* revelation) he shou’d consider himself as possibly falling short of the religion of reason and nature ; which teaches, or I know not what is meant by the religion of reason and nature, that every precept or point of knowledge mediately or immediately delivered to us by God, demands from us a distinguished reverence and regard---as a separate superadded obligation on our consciences. And of consequence it is incumbent on him, before he pretends to assimilate the cause of deism to the religion of reason and nature, to comprize all in the system of the former which the latter recommends; and if under favour of the one he pleads an exem-

exemption from the ties of revelation, he must show his authority from the other to do the same. Now this I conceive to be a criterion of the propriety of the above comparison which he and his admirers are scarce apprized of. And yet 'till they make both agree apparently in rejecting revelation, they cannot pretend to say that deism, and the religion of reason and nature, are absolutely one and the same uniform similar rule of moral agency. That we may therefore put the point here in dispute upon a proper foot of inquiry, and see how far deism in its antichristian scheme of independency, can be justified on the principles of *natural reason and religion*; I will suppose you urging, as a rational foundation for our authors infidel persuasions, the three following perhaps only material arguments to be produced in their behalf.

First, it is not probable that any light, information or instruction touching the deity, or our duty to him, (which our author says is properly speaking a revelation p. 17.) should have been communicated to men by an immediate, particular, special interposition of the deity for that purpose; nor

Secondly, does it appear, that Jesus Christ was really the instrument employed by the deity to convey any such revelation to the world---supposing it not improbable that God may have been inclined at times to afford us one; nor

Lastly,

Lastly, does the authority of those scriptures, which are said to be a most faithful repository of that same revelation, come to us so clear and unquestionable in that point as might be expected; or the writings themselves seem so well calculated, as they ought, to answer those purposes they are presumed to be intended for.

If these the most formidable obstructions to a general reception of christianity, these standing, stumbling blocks in the way of deists should haply at length be removed, though but even to *your* satisfaction and conviction, I shall rest my self content with expecting, what will amply recompence my trouble, if there be any in this address, the pleasure of having luckily prevailed over the too hasty prejudices of a valued friend; and recovered one at least from the infatuated and unthinking *many*, into a rational and manly faith. In order to which I shall not *multiply* reasonings on each particular head of enquiry; but satisfy my self chiefly in the use of one argument alone, when that one alone seems conclusive. "First then; it is not probable say
 " you that any light, information or instruction touching the deity, or our duty to him,
 " &c. should have been communicated to men
 " by an immediate particular and special interposition of the deity for that purpose"--And wherefore? why my reason say you informs
 me

me that the connatural notices in my breast are so sufficiently declarative of the deity, and of my duty to him, to myself and to all mankind, as to render any further instructions in my way to future happiness, useless and unnecessary; which, of consequence therefore, could not have been intended me by my creator.

Your reason! alas, another man's reason, as he terms it, informs him that there is no God. And if the religion of reason and nature consists only in consulting what every man calls his own reason, atheism might as easily be resolved into the religion of nature by those who at any time espoused that particular persuasion, as you be justified in rejecting revelation, because your reason informs you that it is absolutely superfluous and unnecessary.

But hold, say you, by my reason, I do not mean the suggestions of whim, prejudice and partiality---nor a perverse and reprobate mind; but (what points out the deity and my duty to him and to all mankind, and is therefore the religion of reason and nature) an unbiass'd attention to the nature and fitness of things, a law in which is comprehended the whole extent of my duty considered in every relation and circumstance of life whatsoever---a law to which all natures throughout the universe are bound, and which

which therefore seems necessarily to claim my attention in preference to, and even independently of all supernatural guides to my conduct.

Aye! that, my friend, is indeed a true portrait of the religion of reason and nature; and what pity 'tis that the world does not furnish out a few more deists on that plan? There would then be a proportionally less occasion for revelation. But what shall we say when nature, whilst she furnishes out to us so ample a system of moral and religious duties, does abound at the same time with too many specious allurements to recede from and transgress it? What if men, if even deists, from the necessity of their constitution (as free agents I mean) are equally liable to exceed, as capable of acting within the bounds of their duty? Did not sensuality and voluptuousness, did not envy, pride and ambition, too frequently usurp the province of right reason, the religion of nature would not stand so much in need perhaps of the proposed assistances of revelation; but 'tis to remove those obstructions to a proper exercise of the former, that the latter comes in aid. If therefore you would have me acquiesce in your opinion, that revelation is superfluous and unnecessary, you must first prove it to be so by a disinterested enquiry into the real truth of the case-- by a strict attention to
your

your own golden rule, the fitness of things--by, in short, a just comparison of it with the religion of reason and nature. The first suggestions of your own fancy are to be of no moment at all in the affair; nor the prepossessions you may have imbibed from another man's hasty and authoritative declaration. These added to the bias of your own wishes and inclinations, may easily enough persuade you into a belief that revelation is unwarranted. But alas! how easy a matter is it for a man to believe that to be false, which he has either an inclination to suppose, or too much reason to wish, not to be true! If the religion of reason and nature is the rule you profess, or would choose to walk by, try whether from that there be sufficient authority to reject the christian scheme; see whether from the light of the one you can discover any thing really unnatural in the institution of the other--- Whether in the first place, it is in fact not agreeable to reason to suppose that nature (fallible as she appears to be) shou'd receive from time to time such admonitions and instructions from the deity, as may be a probable means to forward her in the discharge of her various duty? And then, secondly, whether revelation having so apparently probability in its favour, can reasonably be treated with so much insolence and contempt? If the principles, on which you ground your
3 deism,

deism, will countenance such a procedure as this; they are but a sandy foundation for your confidence; have a fundamental repugnancy to the very essence of natural religion, and dissent from it in a point of even infinite concern. True, say you, but what then? I am not (as I said before) one of those random contemners of revelation here supposed; I have reasons for my infidelity, well examined into and considered; and (a point which must first necessarily be settled, e'er I can propose yielding up to you all, or even any of my doubts and scruples) have still the circumstance of *improbability* to oppose to the *presumptive evidences* of christianity; the *former* of which greatly preponderates to the disadvantage of the *latter*. For is not the law of nature, when attended to as it ought, (and with whom lies the fault if it is not) a full, sufficient guide to our conduct? Are we not prompted by the dictates of right reason, to act in a manner answerable to the end of our creation, and the dignity of our nature? How preposterous is it then, as says a late eminent writer (1), for a man to hunt after a guide to his conduct, when the author of his being has planted one in his own breast (2)? That

(1) Vide Chubb's farewell.

(2) Under the supposed influence of such an all-sufficient guide to his judgment, how comes it that the author last mentioned should with so little judgment, oppose his own private

That there is interwoven with our nature, a directory to our conduct, which, would we attend to it, would secure us from ever erring

vate opinion to the sentiments of men unquestionably his superiors in every advantage that learning, application, and even natural abilities, could give them? How comes it that he was not instructed from within, to treat with more suitable respect a religion embraced and revered by those, who were not more remarkable for their piety than their parts and penetration? And if the scriptures do really abound with such inconsistencies and absurdities, which he from but a bare superficial knowledge of them, is pleased to lay to their charge, how comes it that they should escape the censure of a *Lock*, an *Addison*, a *Newton*? There is no reason to be given why they should be more partial to any fancied failings of holy writ, than Mr. *Chubb*; — but many, why the judgment they have given in its favour, should be taken in preference to the calumnies and aspersions he has thought fit to load it with. — Unless, as Dr. *Rogers* observes, learning, study, and all those advantages which are usually thought to render one man's judgment preferable to another's, are to be esteemed, in the enquiry after truth, of no moment or consideration whatsoever.

He ought to have consider'd, that if some have, with more stubborn presumption perhaps than self-persuasion, pronounced christianity to be false, none have yet been able to make it appear so to the conviction of sincere, impartial and learned enquirers: and that it would have been worth the employment of his great reasoning abilities, to account for the conduct of the supreme Being, in suffering a deceit of that kind (if it be one) to pass upon mankind thro' so many ages past, for seemingly no other end and purpose, than to be the parent of some of the most cruel miseries to its first champions and defenders, and the fountain whence flowed an ocean of innocent blood. For I think it ought to be particularly remarked that if at any time false religions have been forceably obtruded on mankind by the irresistible authority of the sword, none but ours has been established on the more trying principle, a readiness to *perish with the sword*—none but ours has gained proselytes to its cause, under such strong prophetic intimations of what unparalleled miseries they were to encounter with, who engaged

erring in our practice; a rule to our judgment, to which if we would but appeal, we should as seldom be erroneous in our principles, I can readily enough admit. By the name of conscience, we usually distinguish the one; right reason, we call the other. Two different names, in fact, for one and the same thing. It is the fitness of things, that comprehends both. But is this same law of nature sufficient, in fact, to keep men within the bounds of their complicated duty? Do men invariably act up to the rules that right reason prescribes? That this is not the case, both daily experience, and the standing laws of society, too abundantly evince. And if, in answer to that, it be said, that neither is revelation, with all its coercive authority, or most persuasive allurements, sufficient for these ends, what will follow? Why, that men are men, subject to the controul of passions they even court an obedience to; and will gratify, when it is their inclination so to do, in very opposition to the persuasions of both reason and revelation. The only question to be replied to in the affair of any moment or importance at all, is, which of the two is most

engaged in its defence. And if you can conceive it possible, that men acting under the strongest and most rational persuasions of piety towards God, should be by him given up to such a complicated severity of fate, in consequence of opinions really false and groundless, you must acknowledge, that they were of all men, as unaccountably as undeservedly, the most miserable.

likely to answer now, as a guide, the ends and purposes of religion? Reason, subject as it is to the many apparent frailties and imperfections of human nature? or revelation, which comes in aid thereto, and is proposed to us for the very purpose of removing those imperfections? From the appearance which the former now makes, we are apt to entertain too high an idea of its native original endowments; not considering the advantages it has borrowed, and the education, if I may so speak, which it has received under repeated revelations; by means of which it has been furnished, from time to time, with such insights into the various schemes of Divine Providence, as it could never have discovered by itself. And if you would but carry your thoughts back into those past times of wretchedness and despair, when an horrid gloom of impenetrable darkness, ignorance, and error, like a thick gathered cloud, overshadowed the whole earth; you would surely cease to doubt the *occasion* of God's sending to us, that day-spring from on high to visit us. You would, on the contrary, be induced to acknowledge, with a becoming gratitude, the many singular advantages so happily derived to us therefrom.

For

For as by his fatal transgression, our first parent had bereaved himself, in a great measure, of that inward purity of nature wherein he was created at first, and had contracted thereby a general proneness to sin and wickedness; it is not to be supposed, but that he must transmit to his descendents some share at least of that deadly and diffusive poison. And accordingly we find in fact, that the present generation of men (his offspring) are all born into the world, with a predominant bias towards evil, are become complexionally averse to every thing that is good, and disposed to a life of impiety, unrighteousness, and sensuality. And from the several histories of the heathen world we learn, that men, through a kind of gloomy and sullen despair of divine mercy, arising from a too conscious sense of their own unworthiness, and variously contracted guilt, fell at length into a settled indifference towards that God, on whose deserved wrath and indignation they could not reflect, but under the most terrifying fears, and foreboding apprehensions; till at length, succeeding ages lost sight of both him and his laws; were so far from perceiving, or even wishing his regard for them, that they did not even choose to retain him in their knowledge, but transferred the worship due to the only true God, to an impious adoration of the meanest of his

creatures ; even to birds and four footed beasts, and creeping things. And if the wiser and more understanding part of mankind, were not so universally lost in ignorance and error ; so wholly abandoned to a prostituted worship and service ; yet were *they* notwithstanding in a confessedly wretched and disconsolate state. They were sensible of their lost innocence, and of course forfeited interest with their maker, which their consciences too plainly reminded them of ; and, what must considerably awaken their fears and apprehensions, could not frame to themselves, any plausible scheme for reinstating themselves in his favour. They could easily enough, by the light of nature alone, discover the danger they were in of being punished for their bad conduct ; but could not, from any conclusions of reason, assure themselves, that whenever they were become thus obnoxious to God's justice, that he would remit the punishment due to their crimes, upon either the merit of their repentance, or any peculiar oblations in their power to offer up to him, " tho' they gave their first born for their transgression, the fruit of their body for the sin of their soul." No, this was the great work reserved for our Saviour himself to accomplish. It was he, and he alone, that was to rid them of their fears, and to be the happy instrument of reconciling

reconciling them to their offended God. He it was, whom God himself, sent into the world to save sinners---to preach to them remission of sins, in an unlimited degree, (unlimited, I mean, as to the nature of their crimes) upon the limited, but rational terms of the gospel. In a word, there was wanting, says a very sensible and useful writer (1), there was wanting a revelation to discover, in what manner, and with what kind of external service, God might acceptably be worshipped: there was wanting a revelation to discover, what expiation he would be pleased to accept for sin, when his honour and authority were affronted: there was wanting a revelation to give man assurance of the great motives of religion; the rewards and punishments of a future state: in fine, there was wanting a particular revelation to make the whole doctrine of religion clear and obvious to all capacities; to add weight and authority to the plainest precepts; and to furnish men with extraordinary assistances, to enable them to overcome the corruptions of their nature: and without the assistance of such a revelation, their wisest men were always of this opinion, that the world can never be reformed. You may even give over, says *Socrates*, all hopes of amending

(1) *Vide Stackhouse's body of divinity, p. 19.*

mens manners for the future, unless God be pleased to send you some other person to instruct you: for whatever is set right, says *Plato*, in the present ill state of the world, can only be done by the interposition of God (2). This, in short, is the multiplied business of revelation; this the great work begun by the mosaic, continued by the prophetic, and compleated by the christian dispensation.

Now, if such a supposed circumstance in the divine œconomy, seems to you either incredible or impossible; if you think it an absurdity in nature, to suppose that God should *send* a person into the world purposefully to make discoveries, so apparently necessary to the consolation and future happiness of mankind; that the person thus sent, should be enabled to work miracles in *testimony* of his mission, and at last suffer death to *accomplish* the purposes of it.---If you say all this is really incredible and absurd, you must dispute the merit of even *any* person's claim to an authority, the declared end and purpose of which is, in nature, so extraordinary, and, as you think, so unwarranted.

But if reason will not, cannot, authorize a diffidence so derogatory to those, of all others, the most amiable attributes of the

(2) *Vide Plato* in *Apol. Socrat.*

divine nature, his love, his tenderness, and compassion towards his creatures, in the one case here supposed, I know not how you can justify an insinuation so unfavourable to the dignity and divine authority assumed by Jesus Christ, intimated and implied in the other. That there was actually born into the world, such a person as Jesus Christ, we have at least the same rational evidence for believing, as that there ever existed an *Alexander*, or *Julius Cæsar*. That that same *Jesus* did also work frequent miracles, not even his enemies could deny; tho' they were pleased, sometimes to ascribe them to the agency of *Belzebub*, the prince of devils. That he was, *therefore*, authorized to preach and demand our attention to those several doctrines exhibited to us in his gospel, as to truths delivered by the will and approbation of God, (a point now secondly to be enquired into and considered) we are sufficiently encouraged to believe from the following plain and obvious conclusion of right reason, the only argument on this head, I shall, at present, insist upon.

It is a truth, I think incontestable, that our Saviour could not work miracles, in support of doctrines so unquestionably good and useful, as what are principally the objects of the gospel dispensation, but by the concur-

rent agency of a good spirit necessarily residing in him, or immediately derived to him, from the fountain of all goodness. In either case, it is quite consistent with the dictates of right reason, to attend to the miracles, on account of the doctrines; and to pay a regard to the doctrines, in deference to the miracles. I am not insensible with what contempt this maxim is treated by many as an absurd method of arguing in a circle; yet am I not, therefore, the less satisfied of its force, usefulness, and propriety. For if, at any time, mens attention to a train of truths, not so naturally obvious and intelligible, perhaps, as necessary and important, could be best and most effectually engaged by an awful display of some unusual, some miraculous testimonies to these truths: it is far from being incredible, that such expedients should occasionally have been employed to so noble, generous, and useful an end. But will it as naturally follow, that God should at any time direct, or even permit the use of such extraordinary means of working upon mens senses and passions, barely to mislead them into error? That invariable principle of universal love and benevolence, which gave birth to, and is, as it were, the very soul of creation itself, will ever restrain its Divine Author from reversing, or suffering

ing others to reverse the natural laws of the world, to a purpose so inconsistent with, or repugnant to his moral government of it. Nor can any of those stated laws of nature, which are separately allotted to the regulating each particular and distinct system in the grand *universal whole*, ever be broke in upon or reversed, but by virtue of a power adequate to, or in part and on purpose, communicated from that which at first established them. So that miracles must ever come with a greater or less degree of credibility, in proportion as they are appealed to, in proof of a greater or less good. Nor will the confident report of other miracles, which seem to be urged only in support of doctrines, in themselves false or frivolous, discredit in the least the testimony of those wrought by our Saviour, in evidence of what is true and important—with men, I mean, who are willing to distinguish truth from falsehood; what is, from what is not—with men, in short, who can proportion, properly, their assent to the several different degrees of credibility attested facts come attended with. For two, or more, recorded miracles, may come, supported by the same external circumstances of credibility, and yet they may not be therefore all equally, all internally alike credible. A fit occasion for every supposed miraculous interposition of Divine Power,

Power, must first be proved, e'er we give
a too willing assent to even the most plausible evidence brought in favour of it.

*Nec Deus interfit nisi dignus vindice nodus
Inciderit.* HOR.

And this, together with the known completion of prophecies, which add a degree of probability to the recorded miracles of our Saviour and his apostles none others come attended with, is what gives that partial, but honest bias to our faith in *them*, preferably to, and in contradiction from, all others, of a more modern date whatsoever. Point me out some doctrine fairly deducible from those miracles ascribed to Abbe *Paris*; a doctrine evidently worthy so extraordinary a token of the divine sanction and approbation; a doctrine of real consequence to the present and future happiness of mankind; and which they could not have arrived to the knowledge of, but by some supernatural communication of it from the Deity; and I should be cautious how I disputed the veracity of the reports given of them. But when, on the other hand, the reverse is more evidently the real case, it concerns me not to make them at all a subject of my enquiry. If they would influence men to views and practices, before pronounced

nounced against, by laws natural or revealed, I, in that case, can only suppose, that there is some impenetrable and latent juggle in the affair; and, in fact, that they are no miracles at all; but such lying wonders, only, as were prophesied of, and might possibly be effected by the cunning craftiness of men interested, perhaps, not a little, in casting a mist before the eyes of some that loved darkness rather than light; and who, if their delusive arts were not guarded against, by the precaution mentioned above, would deceive even the very elect. Not to dwell, therefore, unnecessarily long on a point of enquiry, in itself of so little moment, on an imagined difficulty, in the way of our faith as christians, which, in reality, is none none at all; I shall, without even mentioning those several previous dispensations of God's providence, introductory to his mission of *Jesus* in the fulness of time; the wonderful preparation it was introduced with, *viz.* by a long train of preliminary incidents; mystic promises to the ancient patriarchs; a variety of prophetic intimations, both before, and under the legal œconomy; and lastly, an express declaration, that He (by name) should come so peculiarly, and supereminently circumstanced in, or endowed with, the power of working miracles, (whom men were to hear in all things); I
 say,

say, waving these such corroborating circumstances of divine sanction, which might be urged in further evidence of our Saviour's title to the divine character he assumed; it may be sufficient, I presume, to conclude, from his power of working miracles, in support of doctrines so evidently good and useful as those which are conveyed to us in his gospel, that Jesus Christ was really the Instrument employed by the Deity, to convey to mankind, a revelation of his will.—Well, allowing, for argument sake, the *probability* of God's having revealed himself, (by means of the gospel of Jesus Christ) for the information, comfort, and future happiness of mankind, yet, shew me, say you, in the *third* place, the genuineness of those writings, which are said to be such a faithful repository of that same revelation, and their expediency to answer those very purposes they are presumed to be intended for. How, in the first place, does it appear, that the scriptures contain the writings of those very persons, under whose names they are published; or, that the several circumstances therein related, have, as historical narrations, a proper evidence to support them? Why, all this I believe, upon the same grounds of credibility, that I believe the authenticity and genuineness of any other book or history

ry you shall name me. But are writings, in which are said to be concerned the salvation of mankind, to be put upon the same footing with books which contain in them little more, perhaps, than meer matters of amusement? Is it of the same consequence, whether those histories, in which are recorded the exploits of even a *Cæsar*, and an *Alexander*, are true and genuine relations, as the history of our Saviour and his apostles? No, that be far from me to insinuate. But then, unless you think it reasonable to disregard all faith in history, as a point of credulity in itself absurd and unwarrantable, and will insist upon it, that nothing in fact is to be believed, but what we ourselves see done before our eyes; I would ask you, how things transacted at a considerable distance of time past, whether of sacred story or prophane, can be transmitted to posterity, but through the same kind of channel? And what other methods need be used, to engage our confidence in the one, than is necessary to establish the credit and authority of the other? And by what arguments would you endeavour to convince me, that *Livy* and *Herodotus* were in reality the authors of those histories that go, with such unquestioned pretensions, under their names, and that the accounts given by each, have, as historical narrations, a proper evidence to support them,

them, that will not hold equally strong, in either of those particulars, with respect to the histories of both the old and new testament?---Well, supposing that to be a consideration, as much in favour, as you would wish, of the authenticity of the scriptures in general, yet how, say you, do they appear to answer those particular purposes of information and instruction, they are presumed to be intended for? For how shall I know where, among such a variety of readings in the same book, to fix upon that which is the true one?---Why, the same rules of criticism that you would make use of, to discover the true reading of any one author among the classics at large, must be employed in your perusal and examination of these. In either case, your reason (as far as you have qualified it for passing judgment, by those usual helps and assistances, which enable a man to become a critic in any other learned composition whatsoever) must be your guide. If, at any time, in the course of your enquiries, doubts and difficulties should arise, which you yourself cannot master, you must, in order to their being set in a true and proper light, have recourse to, and depend on, in proportion to their superior skill and acquirements, the judgment and opinion of others. And unless you would conclude, because various have been

been the readings of *Homer*, of *Virgil*, and of *Horace*, that therefore neither of them are to be regarded as genuine and established writers, or as authors deserving our perusal and regard; I will desire you, to put it home to your breast, and ingenuously tell me, whether you think there is, in reality, any foundation for impeaching the sacred writings of non-authenticity and unfaithfulness, of insufficiency as a rule of faith, or of unwarranted pretensions, as a repository of revealed truths, because they have accidentally given occasion to a variety of dissonant readings and interpretations? But who, in the difficult cases above supposed, are the judges I am, at last, to be determined by, when among those very persons, who claim an *authority* to preach and expound scripture doctrine, so few, even of those, agree in giving the same unvaried meaning, to the same passages and expressions, in those admired pages?

A question is here supposed, which may be best answered by the following important piece of advice, which is this.

After having examined thoroughly and impartially into the evidence of christianity, be careful to distinguish between that and the pretended truths charged upon it. Make yourself master of every argument that points out the divine authority of our Saviour; and
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when that is done, attend closely to the several doctrines he has established, in consequence and by virtue of it. What he says, you are bound, as you regard the divine commission he lays claim to, implicitly to give credit to. What *others* say for him, or assert of him, by virtue of a similar kind of authority from him, that claims, in proportion, the same regard too. So that those doctrines which our Saviour delivered concerning the Father, himself, and all mankind, or the apostles, in his name, those it is necessary you should embrace without reserve. Thus far shalt thou go, and no further; I mean, for faith necessarily *undefiled*. For practice you may go farther; from the scriptures you may repair to those venerable lights, the fathers, for edification, for discipline, for patterns of sanctity and moral purity. There you have an unbounded field of instruction to range in. But if, through an excess of pious zeal, they would, at any time, carry you into matters of faith (or practice) not warranted by either reason or revelation, there, if you are wise, you would take your leave of them: for though they are not the sorry dishonest set of men a late eminent writer has penciled them out to the world; yet neither are they the infallible guides some others mistake them for: we owe much to them for their transmitted records of primitive sto-

ry, much to their exemplary piety and devotion, much to their unshaken constancy and christian fortitude. Let us, however, not be afraid to acknowledge, that they casually shared weaknesses and imperfections in common with the rest of mankind. And when these are made the subject of ridiculous banter by some, let us not be under such an alarm and uneasiness, as if, with theirs, the reputation of christianity must proportionally sink too. Revelation comes to us as a kind of handmaid to our reason, furnished with some friendly assistances towards the practice of those duties which right reason recommends. Every proposed article of faith and practice therefore, which is not apparently calculated to promote that great end, may be looked upon as a point (when not plainly delivered in holy writ) so far of doubtful credit and authority, as that neither, if we believe them, are we the better, neither, if we believe them not, are we the worse. But will you, because disputes may have run high on some false topics of enquiry, weakly or wickedly termed christian, conclude, that therefore all the real pretensions of revelation are, in the gross, to be disregarded and neglected? Your boasted religion of nature, in which there is scarce any one principle that has not been made the subject of dispute, may, by a parity of reason,

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son, be rejected at the same time. "Has not the existence of a God, the liberty of man, the nature of good and evil; what is happiness; what it is that thinks within us; whether the soul be material or immaterial, mortal or immortal; the nature of justice and moral honesty; in short, every point of morality or natural religion, been controverted? Is the inference from thence, that there is, or can be no such thing as natural religion? Is there no such thing as truth, because the question has been, what is truth? Is there no such thing as right reason, because men have maintained infinite absurdities and contradictions about every thing in even matters of moral obligation?" (1) But would not providence, say some, have prevented the scriptures from becoming such a source of various sentiments and opinions, if he had intended them for that general and important benefit you imagine? Would he not have left us such an unerring criterion, by which to judge of their true meaning, as he that runneth might read, or that all who have the same opportunities and qualifications for consulting them, must necessarily unite in giving the same meaning to the same passages and expressions?

If this is reasonably to be expected of *revelation*, as a guide, I would ask, why does

(1) *Vid.* Dr. *Benson's* reasonableness of christianity.

it happen, that, under the supposed *infallible* direction of right reason, any two in life are capable of differing in point of judgment and opinion, in even matters of moral obligation? A supposed infallibility in the *writers* of revealed truths, does not necessarily preclude the natural fallibility of their several *readers*.---In short, the unerring criterion by which to judge of the truth of revelation in general, and the doctrines severally deducible therefrom, is absolutely and solely right reason. But whilst different men, of different views, prejudices, and prepossessions, substitute *opinion* in its stead, it is no wonder, if many others are betrayed into a complaint, that no fixed rule at all is given us for that purpose.

I hope, by this time, that my friend is somewhat inclined to admit the rationality of *my* plea, that a deist, in order to his thinking and acting agreeably to the religion of reason and nature, in other words, e'er a deist and a moral man can be said to be, in principles, one and the same, it is necessary, that the former, in a country where christianity is established, should be a friend to, and espouse, with sincerity, the religion of Jesus Christ; for *that* coming to us as a promulgation of divine truths and instructions, lays evidently as great a claim to our notice and esteem, as any other moral obligations whatsoever.

soever. Nor is it an argument of any weight, which some urge against the probability of revelation, that the moral duties it means to enforce, are none else than what natural religion acquiesces in, and recommends; this should serve rather to strengthen than weaken its authority; since, to the natural obligations, which christianity recommends to our regard, it super-adds as well proper motives as proper means, to engage us in the practice of them; to name no more, at present, with regard to the latter, than the duties of *examination*, *mortification* and *self-denial*, which are indisputably such points of discipline, as all, who impartially consider them, will acknowledge to be established upon views truly rational, useful and becoming. With what consistency of temper can deists therefore take upon them to treat with so little ceremony the christian scheme of religion, whose obligation to it is so apparently founded on even their own avowed principles, their own favourite rule of action, the religion of reason and nature?

But to proceed to some other remarks on our *pamphlet*; from which if, at any time, I ramble, to give scope to some reflections not naturally incidental, perhaps, to the subject matter of our author's own observations, I, in that case, can only hope, that they may be accidentally interesting enough to recom-
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pence to you any such occasional trespass on your time.

Our author, if you remember, closes the passage I last expatiated upon, with the following remarkable postulatam, viz. "That *Socrates*, and those of old, were as great ornaments, and did as much honour to human nature as any christian ever did." (p. 5.)

If he had said, that *Socrates*, &c. did as much honour, and were as great ornaments to human nature, so circumstanced as it was in *their* days, as *christians* do and are now to the improved religion, and other superior advantages *they* pride themselves in the possession of, there had been perhaps too much truth in the remark. But if he means by the reflection, what seems too apparently to be his proposed conclusion therefrom, that nothing more is required of *us*, in point of moral and religious obligations, than, besides copying those worthies of old in their practice, to attend with a becoming conscientious deference to their precepts, he undoubtedly misleads his admirers into a most palpable and fatal error. He, in that case, either weakly or wickedly deceives them. He must either not know what are the designed ends and purposes of revelation--and then his random aspersions on it are an argument of a most unpardonable wantonness of impiety, a prejudging irreverence of behaviour to-

wards its divine author ; or he must knowingly and wilfully misrepresent them---and then I would ask how it stands with his moral honesty, and integrity, and justice to the world ?

He cannot or at least ought not but know that the kind design of christianity was to make such discoveries as should, and, if duly attended to, would lead to actions more suitably good and rational, than were before in *general* practice ; to enforce the obligation of moral duties, by stronger and more persuasive motives than the religion of nature *depraved*, than even the religion and improved sentiments of *Socrates* could, with any proper authority, establish--and to complete men for attainments they were created for at first.

The religion of old furnished out such *general* intimations only with respect to those strong and lively enforcements to the practice of the law of nature [which are the principal characteristics of christianity] as were either very doubtful, dark and obscure, or else more conspicuously weak, whimsical, and absurd. Witness their many extravagant conceptions of the nature of God, and the internal nature and principle of man ; their confused ideas of the origin, formation, and government of the world, and their still more inconsistent views and practices in the nature
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of their religious worship, which they distinguished themselves in the performance of, either by acts of idolatrous impiety, or pious inhumanity ; by either worshipping even *stocks or stones*, or *offering up their sons and their daughters unto devils*.

The intended redemption of mankind, from the guilt and misery they were too conscious of having contracted, the doctrine of a resurrection from the dead, of a judgment to come, and of rewards and punishments in an after-state---these are truths, which, allowing that men ever arrived to any tolerable degree of knowledge concerning them, vanished from the world for a long time before the coming of our Saviour. Nor does it appear, that life and immortality were ever clearly brought to light, but by the gospel ; no, not to the all-penetrating eye of *Socrates*, or even the divine *Plato* himself. The *nature* and *terms*, however, of the redemption, the *person* by whom it was to be effected, and by whom the world is at last to be judged were circumstances of information, in their nature, not capable of being derived to them, but through the channel of revelation.

But if *Socrates* was, perhaps, confirmed in the belief of some of these truths himself, yet could he not make them so apparent to those about him ; could not publish and proclaim them to the world with that degree of con-

fidence and authority as did our *Saviour*; who, by a series of miracles, prophecies, and an unspotted conduct, gave sufficient evidence to the impartial world, of a derived commission from *heaven*, to declare, confirm, and establish them.

But if, after all, you could prove to me, that moral obligations, which *Socrates* is presumed so remarkably to have attended to, and shone in the discharge of, work so universally strong and powerfully on men's consciences, as that they naturally perform what they see or know to be their duty, I would grant you, that then nothing more would seem needful, as a law to our conduct, than the awakening voice of nature and right reason. But since daily experience evinces, that men want more to be excited to the practice than instructed in the principles of their duty, it is evident, that revelation, if only on account of its many peculiar motives to virtue, is *therefore* highly eligible, and worthy of acceptation. For what can we conceive more necessary and important, more conducive to the safety and well-being of society, than the engaging mens attention to its own public laws in general, as well as to those of a more private, tho' not less diffusive nature in particular---the obligations to piety, temperance, chastity, and charity--on the principles of christian obedience?

obedience? Of what general advantage, I say, must it be, to have those duties *enforced* on the consciences of men, by the added hopes and terrors of a day to come, when *God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.* But, to proceed---Our author, in page the sixth, gives us a notable specimen of his dexterity in forging, on occasion, the stamp of *authority* on the deists principles, in order to make them pass with a more specious splendid currency through the world; and the instance I am going to give of it, serves, at the same time, to shew, with what assiduity and eagerness men will catch at every the smallest twig they can meet with in their way, to save a sinking cause; the great name he has been pleased, in the following case, to make free with, being, ever before, universally distinguished under principles as dissimilar to his own, as light is to darkness, or orthodoxy to infidelity.

Dr. *Sherlock*, if you will believe our author, is one of those rational divines, who assert, "that deism is the alone excellency and true glory of christianity" (*p.* 6.)--If he had consulted the bishop with any other view than, by laying hold of some detached unconnected passages in his sermon, (1) to
make

(1) Sermon for propagating the gospel in foreign parts.

make it speak, if possible, with some seeming approbation of *his* scheme of thinking, he would, I am persuaded, have found, in instances without number, that his lordship and he think as differently of revelation, as a believer and unbeliever can possibly do.

“ The religion of the gospel, says the bishop, is the true original religion of reason and nature.” And again, ‘ the gospel has reference to the law of reason and nature : ’ And what of all that ? Is the bishop a deist on the evidence of these declarations ? If he is not, to what purpose is he quoted ? And if he is, mark the consequence to our author.

Dr. *Sherlock* says, and our author himself approves the assertion, “ that the religion of the gospel is the true original religion of reason and nature.” Aye ! what this from a deist ? Alas ! our author, like a confused culprit at the *Old Baily*, cites, at once, a fancied friend to his character, without considering, that the man was too honest not to say what he thought ; and that the evidence he must give, would but aggravate, and add weight to the prosecution.

Here the bishop is called in, to vouch for our author’s rationality as a deist. Well, and how does he prove it ? Why, by asserting, that that revelation, which the deist derides, is nothing short of the religion of reason

son and nature, which he pretends to approve. Our author for your man of *sound judgment, and nervous reasoning* ! But yet, says he, the bishop ingenuously owns, that “ there are “ some institutions in the gospel, which are, “ in their own nature, no constituent parts “ of religion.” (*p. 6.*) I here very much suspect some foul play from our author, that either his lordship makes use of no such expressions, or that, when connected as they should be, they bear a meaning quite different from that under which our author would represent them. But not having the sermon alluded to by me, I can only doubt, not disprove our author’s justice to his lordship.

Our author having here, a little unluckily for himself, cited a passage from Dr. *Sherlock*, which proves too plainly, that his opposition to christianity is alike repugnant to the principles of *natural reason and religion*, is forced, at last, to add, by way of supplement to his lordship’s own words, conscious how inexpressive they were before to his advantage, or rather, how expressive to his confusion, something, though full as little to his purpose, from the product of his own brain.

After telling us, that Dr. *Sherlock* says, “ it is true, that there are some institutions “ in the gospel, which, in their own nature, “ are

“ are no *constituent parts of religion.*” I will venture to add, cries he, “ that the same “ may be said, for ought that appears to the “ contrary, of some *doctrines* of the gospel, “ which doctrines, together with the institu- “ tions referred to, may be said to constitute “ pure christianity, by way of contradistinc- “ tion to pure natural religion.” (*p. 6.*) So that, according to the very modest reasoning of our author, what constitutes pure christianity in the gross, is an absolute and entire opposition in all its parts, in precepts, ceremonies, and doctrines, to the very being of natural religion; and that those institutions, and ceremonies and doctrines, and those only which are no constituent parts of natural religion, do collectively make up the sum total of christianity. Was this, in reality, the case, was christianity, in fact, so unreasonable, I will add, so *irreligious* an institution, I would myself join our author in condemning and rejecting it; or, with Mr. *Chandler*, agree, that it would then be scarce worth while to enquire what the religion of Christ is, (*p. 7.*)

But what if, after all, it appears, that those very institutions, ceremonies, and doctrines, which constitute pure christianity, are so far from being no *constituent parts* of religion, that they are absolutely, and to all intents and purposes, one and the same, proportionally I mean,

mean, and as parts to the whole. For you must observe, that I regard every subservient *instrument* of religion, as a material part of religion itself.---That a publick worship of the deity is not less a part of the religion of reason and nature, than a positive precept of the gospel, our author cannot aim at disproving, without opposing, at the same time, the general sense and practice of all ages past, there being no people, of any religion whatsoever, but what always expressed, in a publick manner, their veneration of the deities they owned, by such external tokens of reverence, as were most in use among them (1). “*Lactantius*, as an argument of the absurdity of Polytheism, supposes it an universal concession among men, that they should pay to each God, whom they acknowledged, divine worship. And this not only in honour of his divinity, but in consideration of his paternity, as that one common parent, from whom they received life, health, and food (2). And of such consequence to the happiness of a state, says *Tully*, is piety towards the Gods, “that take away that, and you undermine the very foundations on which

(1) *Scott's works*, vol. II. p. 130. Fol. edit.

(2) *Omnem Deum qui ab homine colitur necesse est inter solennes ritus & preces patrem nuncupari, non tantum honoris gratia verum etiam rationis quod & antiquior est homine, & quod vitam salutem victum præstat ut pater. Lactant. de verâ sap. & relig. lib. IV. p. 177.*

integrity,

integrity, friendship, and that most excellent of all virtues, justice itself, are supported" (3). "And if we would endeavour, says *Woolaston*, to behave ourselves to God according to truth, we shall find ourselves bound to worship him in the best manner we can. By worshipping him, I mean, says he, owning him to be what he is, and ourselves to be what we are, by some more solemn and proper act; that is, by addressing ourselves (as his dependents) to him, as the supreme cause and governor of the world, with acknowledgments of what we enjoy, petitions for what we really want, or he knows to be convenient for us (4)."

And yet how can a scheme of publick worship, with any decency or propriety, be carried on, but under the favour of a supposed agreement of men, in some such visible observances, such outward religious actions and declarations, which the wisdom of each state shall judge most fit and reasonable in themselves, most expressive of that internal faith, love, and obedience, which they are called to by their *religion*; and most likely to kindle in each others breasts a lively and lasting sense of piety, devotion, and every virtue. Instead thereof, of disregard-

(3) Pietate adversus Deos sublata fides etiam & societas humani generis, & excellentissima virtus justitia tollitur. *Cic. de nat. deor.*

(4) *Woolaston's relig. of nat.*

ing these necessary appendages to publick worship, as *no constituent parts* of religion ; as mere niceties and trifles, of no manner of consideration in the sight of God, (which is the case with too many of those who even call themselves christians) men should consider, whether they have, or have not, an apparent view to the known purposes of religion ; whether outward actions, which are so many presumptive evidences of inward dispositions to piety and virtue in ourselves, are not likely to promote the same worthy affections in others ? And whether, in proportion to the importance of the end, we are not to regard the means conducive to that end ?--What adds still greater weight to their authority and use, is the sanction given them by our present governors, civil and ecclesiastical, either in obedience to the express commands, or in compliance with the usual practices of the apostles, and first teachers and instructors employed in the conducting the affairs of that church, which our Saviour, under their ministration, and by the particular direction of God, has established upon earth. When considered therefore in this light, they become equally obligatory on our consciences, as other positive and more express precepts of the gospel.

As to those two *sacramental* duties of our profession, viz. *Baptism* and the *Lord's Supper*,

per, these are positive institutions, how decent, reasonable, and morally instructive, how well calculated to raise our devotions, to inflame our gratitude, to infuse generous sentiments, those best can tell, for those only know, who have personally *ratified* the one, and been seriously *ingaged* in the solemnities of the other. Be pleased, however, if it be not a subject too grave to engage your attention, to take an opinion of them both, from the learned Dr. *Jenkins*. “ One of the purposes, says he, for which sacraments were instituted, was to be outward and visible signs of our entrance into covenant with him. For if covenants between man and man be made with all the formality of witnessesses of hands, and seals and delivery, in solemn and express words; if men know themselves too well to trust one another, without this solemnity, it may well be expected, that when God is pleased to permit them to enter into covenant with himself, he should not receive them under less obligations of caution and security for their integrity, than men are wont to use among one another; since every breach of covenant with him is infinitely more affronting and sinful, than any breach of covenant with man can be. And as their outward signs serve to raise our attentions, and fix our minds, and so put us in remembrance,

“ that

“ that heaven and earth, angels and men,
 “ are witnesses against us, if we prove trea-
 “ cherous and unfaithful in this covenant;
 “ so they are as tokens and pledges to us of
 “ God’s love and favour, and give us sensi-
 “ ble and visible assurances of that grace
 “ which is invisible and spiritual. ’Tis not a
 “ little in the nature and temper of man, to
 “ be better pleased and contented with some-
 “ thing present in hand, tho’ of small value,
 “ and insignificant in itself, as a token and
 “ pledge of what is made over to him, than
 “ with the greatest promises and protesta-
 “ tions, without any thing as an earnest to
 “ confirm them. Now, what is inward and
 “ invisible is absent as to sense, and what is
 “ future stands in need of something present
 “ to represent it to us; and therefore God,
 “ who was pleased to bind himself, as it
 “ were, by an oath, that he might be want-
 “ ing in nothing which might help our in-
 “ firmities, and assist our faith, has been
 “ pleased, for our comfort and trust in him,
 “ to appoint visible signs and pledges of that
 “ which is invisible, and to give such assu-
 “ rance to our very senses, as they are capa-
 “ ble of, that all the promises of his spiritual
 “ blessings, shall be as certainly fulfilled to us,
 “ as the outward signs and pledges are duly re-
 “ ceived by us; that the soul, even in this case,
 “ where it is more immediately concerned,
 E “ might

“ might not be wholly independent on the
 “ body ; but since both must be happy or
 “ miserable together in the next world, both
 “ might be assistant in the way and means of
 “ salvation in this.”

And to shew the moral influence which
 the use of these sacraments has naturally on
 our minds, the same author observes, of bap-
 tism, that “ it is a very significant, and
 “ apt representation of the cleansing and pu-
 “ rifying the soul from sin ; and that in this,
 “ men of all nations and all religions, seem
 “ to have been agreed. For nothing was
 “ more frequent among the heathens, than
 “ their washings and purifyings, and though
 “ they attributed a great deal too much to
 “ them, yet the superstitious opinions which
 “ they had of these outward cleansings, could
 “ never have so universally prevailed, if
 “ there had not been some foundation for
 “ the use of them, in the nature of things ;
 “ and that is the great fitness which is in
 “ those outward washings, to excite us to
 “ purity of mind, and to represent the great
 “ duty which lies upon us, to keep our con-
 “ sciences undefiled, which only can render
 “ us acceptable to God. And of the Lords
 “ Supper he observes, that the elements of
 “ bread and wine have a peculiar suitable-
 “ ness, to bring to our remembrance the
 “ body and blood of Christ, offered upon
 “ the

“ the cross for us, to make us partakers of
 “ them, to become the commemorative, and
 “ representative signs of the eucharist, and to
 “ be pledges of all the benefits which we re-
 “ ceive thereby (1). It is, as Dr. *Scott*
 “ observes, a solemn commemoration of
 “ Christ’s death, and is an expression of
 “ kindness, sufficient to captivate the most
 “ ungrateful souls, and extort obedience from
 “ them; it is a fœderal right, whereby God
 “ and we, by feasting as it were together,
 “ do according to the ancient custom of
 “ Jews and Heathens, mutually engage our-
 “ selves one to another; whereby God, by
 “ giving us the mystical bread and wine, and
 “ we by receiving them, do mutually en-
 “ gage ourselves to one another, upon those
 “ sacred pledges of Christ’s body and blood,
 “ that we will faithfully perform each their
 “ part of that everlasting covenant, which
 “ was purchased by Christ; and what can be
 “ greater restraint to us, when we are solli-
 “ cited to any sin, than the sense of being
 “ under such a dreadful vow and obligation?
 “ with what face dare we listen to any temp-
 “ tation to evil, when we remember how late-
 “ ly we solemnly engaged ourselves to the con-
 “ trary, and took the sacrament upon it (2)?

(1) Vide *Jenkins’s* reasonableness of the Christian religion, *Stackhouse’s* body of divinity.

(2) Vide *Scot’s* christian life, 1 vol. p. 115.

In short, if to initiate into the sacred privileges of a church, established by divine authority, the dear offspring of our bodies ; if to admit them thereto under a ceremonial observance, prescribed by its divine author and supreme governor himself ; if to testify in an humble and devotional manner, our love and gratitude to him who laid down his life for our sakes, and to commemorate that so extraordinary an instance of extensive love and tenderness, by the observance of a symbolical rite, which he in his last moments, as it were, gave in charge to us. If, I say, to dedicate ourselves, as is in baptism supposed, in so awful and solemn a manner, to the worship and service of God ; and in the Lord's supper, to acknowledge with such significant tokens of gratitude and affection, our obligation to our divine law-giver and instructor, our mediator, our redeemer, be not acts, when with sincerity perform'd, of the most consummate piety and devotion ; and, as such, even more than *constituent parts of* religion, I know not what it is to be rationally pious ; what it is to be piously and rationally devout ; what to be religious.

If, at any time, these established memento's to our conduct fail having the intended influence on our morals ; it is, because we ourselves suffer them not to operate with
any

any proper advantage on our minds. The remembrance of that God, to whom we have devoted ourselves in baptism, passeth away perhaps, from off our minds, as the remembrance of a guest that tarrieth but a day ; and the cup of blessing too frequently from our lips, as if we only *drank* to one ; that cup, alas ! which, instead of being a proper test of our aversion to those sins which occasioned Christ's death, is, alas ! too often made an occasional introduction only, to an opportunity of prosecuting them in higher life.

But religion, says a distinguished writer, of our author's class of reasoners (1) ; is a matter purely personal, and the knowledge of it to be obtained by personal considerations, independently on any guides, teachers, or authority, and of consequence established ceremonies. An observation, which, however confidently urged, will, I am persuaded, then only hold good, when there cease to be such men in the world as he who first advanced it. If human nature was really in such a state of perfection, as that every man left to himself, would reason justly, judge truly, and act agreeably, there would be little occasion for laws, govern-

(1) Author of scheme of literal prophecy.

ment, or authority in the world. But men taken in the gross, are, and ever will be weak, ignorant, passionate and conceited; and must therefore be determined by some authority or other (1): must be made to acquiesce in such an uniform scheme of piety, and other virtues more immediately moral, as may claim an universal deference and respect. But how could this be the case, if either every man's own reasonings were to be the standard of right and wrong, with respect to the *one*? for then there would be as many schemes of piety, as there are passions to which men are subject. Or, if his private will and authority should entitle him to settle and adjust the boundaries of the *other*? for then that only would be morality which coincided most with a man's mind. Nor would the magistrate's sanction alone, answer the purpose much better; for in that case, *both* would be as variable as his own will was capable of being, and as precarious too as his authority. With what consistent goodness has God himself interposed an authoritative declaration of his will, in a matter of such mighty importance, (which *none* can claim a right to dispute); and given a law to our conduct in the great points of piety and morality, which cut off all *reasonable* occa-

(1) Rogers's preface in vindicat. of the Christ. rel.

sions for doubts or difficulties in either ! who takes upon him therefore to treat not only with no ceremony, but with open contempt and derision, those prescribed forms of religion, which are calculated to unite men in one common rational scheme of publick worship, and other publick religious duties ; who espouses such principles of independency in matters of religion, as tend to exclude therefrom all established modes of faith, all human authority, all ecclesiastical distinctions of order and office in the church, (without which, an established worship could not prevail) resisteth in effect, the ordinances of God, impiously rejects the methods which God has appointed for obtaining his favour ; and, instead of studying to worship him in the beauty of holiness, aims rebelliously to introduce into his kingdom all the mischievous inconsistencies of an irreligious anarchy and confusion. In short, the great use and intent of all the positive duties and ceremonies of our religion, are obvious enough to all, who will with fairness and impartiality examine into them ; nor do any of its doctrinal points, when not misinterpreted and misapplied, convey any sense and meaning, that right reason will not allow to be a rational object of our faith and practice, and, as such, *constituent* parts of religion. They not only open to us such noble discoveries

concerning the nature of the Deity, and the origin of the universe, as were not to be attained to by the painful researches of the most penetrating *geniuses*, most distinguished philosophers, but propose to us, at the same time, a scheme of morality, that far surpasses all that ever the *Licurgus's*, the *Numa's*, the *Plato's*, and the *Aristotle's* have laid down (1). What then will follow? Why,

(1) Would men but examine into the reasonableness of the doctrines, and moral precepts of the gospel, with coolness and impartiality; not by the treacherous bent of their depraved wills and affections, but by the unerring test of sober reason and reflection, they would at once acknowledge, that to love God, *with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength*, is but a just debt of gratitude to our Maker, for those numberless blessings, we are every moment receiving from his all-bountiful hand. And as the God and author of nature is *holy*, that it should be our study to be *holy in all manner of conversation*; that if we would pass through the waves of a troublesome world, with a cheerful and serene mind, we must be *patient*, under the afflicting hand of heaven, whose will we know to be an irresistible law; and resign up our wishes to his sovereign pleasure, in confidence of that tenderness which we know he bears to every individual of his creation.

As to those precepts of christianity, which seem to bear the hardest upon human nature. viz. *repentance and restitution, mortification and self-denial, humility, contentment and resignation, forgiving, yea, and loving your enemies*; what are these, when rightly considered, but injunctions highly reasonable in themselves, and conducive to our real happiness? What can be more reasonable than sorrow, or a repentant anguish of mind, for offences more immediately committed against God, or restitution and retaliation for injuries we have at any time offered towards men? What more reasonable and advantageous, than that we should mortify and subdue those

Why, that all those institutions, ceremonies, and doctrines, which constitute pure christianity, demand our utmost reverence and esteem; that we do not act up to the religion of reason and nature, when we dare to treat them with contempt, neglect or indifference; and that if you would be a rationalist, not in speculation only, but in practice; you must add to the virtues of meer morality, the faith and principles of christianity: unless it appears that those writings whence we are supposed to draw our belief as christians, are a cheat and imposition on mankind. If they come in fact with that authority we ascribe to them, the very dictates of natural religion, challenge your regard to them; and that they do not, it is at your peril to assert, but upon sure and *unquestionable* grounds. Nor is the disputed authority of revelation, my friend, so immaterial a point of enquiry,

those fatal and rebellious lusts, that dare oppose the dictates of right reason, that would intice us into a violation of the laws of virtue and integrity, and subject us to the vengeance of an angry God? And humility, is not *that* a prudent, laudable, and advantageous species of conduct? That reputation or respect, which is the supreme ambition of *all*, how surely is it the portion of the affable, meek, and humble only! And as for those other pacifick virtues, of rendring good for evil, forgiving injuries, and even loving our enemies, how notorious is it, in their behalf, that they ever appear to the advantage of those who are eminent in the practice of them! How mollifying and attractive, how preventive of those many restless tumults, which are ever harrassing the minds of the revengeful and malicious!

as you seem sometimes too fondly to imagine. What! shall the maker of heaven and earth be said to address his creatures in the language of *men*, and they either treat *him*, through whom he speaks to them, with open scorn? or carelessly *unconcern* themselves, whether he speak to them or not? Shall an ambassador from temporal majesty and power claim so much, and one from heaven so little, reverence and respect? Or if you doubt, will you think it necessary to inquire into the credentials of the one, and not be at the same pains to examine into the pretensions of the other? How does this consist with the persuasions of even common sense or common gratitude? *You* may perhaps thank your God, with the proud Pharisee in the gospel, that you are not as other men are, *extortioners, unjust, adulterers, &c.* may possibly transcribe into outward practice that law within your breast, to which we suppose revelation comes in aid! *you* may want none of its imagined motives to influence *your* conduct; *you* may perhaps be able, unassisted by any external guides, to learn, and live within the measures of your duty to God, your neighbour, and yourself; to do justice, love mercy, and to walk, as you think, humbly with your God; may contemplate thoroughly the nature and fitness of things, the native obligations and inducements to
piety

piety and virtue, and the inherent odiousness and destructive qualities of vice and irreligion; *you* may perhaps be instructed from within yourself, in the knowledge of even the whole duty of man. Happy you, who *know* these things so well! happier still if you *do* them!

But are there none in life who, with the *knowledge*, have not yet the *prudence* here supposed? Or rather, are there not millions in the world that have neither? And shall all your regards center in your own important self? Have you no tender working of humanity, towards the wants and necessities of your fellow-creatures? Have you equally no regard for them who *know* not, and for them who *will* not *do* their duty? Have you, who enjoy the glorious light of the sun, no sense of the wretched state and condition of those who still sit in darkness? What if you, thorough a whimsical contempt of day, should choose rather to pursue the business of your ordinary calling in the night? must daylight be therefore of less benefit and importance to the more rational part of the world? If *you* are whole and need not a physician, must they that are sick not be prescribed to? I will grant *you*, for argument sake, to be possessed of right rational sentiments of the Deity, and to be versed in every species of worship and service that it is necessary you

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should

should pay him. But are you sure you are indebted to revelation for no part of this knowledge? If that be the case, how comes it to pass, that there are so many inconsistencies in those corners of the world, where the rays of revelation have not been *permitted* yet to reach, in both those particulars? How comes it, that those gross absurdities in the heathen worship of old, are in part continued among the pagan *Indians*, (in the extensive empire of the Great Mogul) to this day? The darkness, alas! which these unhappily labour under, how surely is it owing to a perverse, uncontroul'd exercise of power in those their *rulers* over them, who unwarrantably intercept a light from shining before men, which might, and otherwise would reflect alike, happiness and glory to the Creator, and all his creatures? And shall not this circumstance put to silence that frivolous objection to the credit and authority of revelation, which is drawn from its present want of *Universality*? Must natural causes be found to produce their natural effects? and an argument be drawn from thence, to impeach the wisdom and justice of divine providence? Must God be partial in his designs, or weak in the execution of them, because he will not over-rule the perverse wills and affections of his creatures, that they may receive his proffered blessings? Must christianity
be

be a cheat, or God unjust, in not making it general, because mahometism prevails at present against it? As well may you suppose, that because iniquity abounds in various shapes in life, that the maker and governor of the world, delighteth not in virtue. (But of this more hereafter). In the mean time, let me indulge a wish, that whilst kings of the earth stand up, and rulers take counsel together, against the religion of the Lord's anointed; some by diverting that stream of divine benevolence, which means to flow alike to all, from its genuine and natural course; others, by polluting it with impious and unwholesome vanities; let me, I say wish you, to take care, that you do not stand charged with the ungenerous guilt of either, directly or indirectly, impeding its progress within your sphere of action. Let me wish, that you would be as industrious in inquiring into its real excellencies and virtues, as you are to expose its imagined blemishes and imperfections. Let not popular clamours prevail over the persuasions of reason, of conscience, of scripture, from mere prejudice. On reason it is founded. Let reason therefore be the judge, (the only judge) to determine the merits of its pretensions. But alas! to what satisfactory purpose, say you, shall a man engage in an enquiry of this kind, so productive as it is, of never ending disputes?

putes? Why should I not content myself, with endeavouring to discharge all the more *immediate* duties of morality, which is in fact, acting up to, or answering, as far as is incumbent on each individual, all the ends and purposes of revelation? A question, which I will answer by *another*, alike pertinent. It is this, can any point of knowledge be of equal importance, with that which, in any degree, respects a man's salvation? And, if it is not impossible (but on the contrary highly probable) that God may have made some *express* declaration of his will, can any thing be more unjust, ungenerous, and unwise, not to enquire what that will is? Is your happiness dependent on his pleasure, and will you not use your endeavours, to learn what his whole pleasure is? Is it of no consequence to be informed, that he will have mercy, and not sacrifice: That he delighteth not in the blood of bulls and of goats, nor of men (1)? That the sacrifice of carnal lusts and appetites, are the oblations he requires? Is it of no moment to be directed to the *means* proper for obtaining pardon and forgiveness for past offences? Are there any measures prescribed by *natu-*

(1) And yet had your education been among those with whom religious barbarities of the latter kind prevailed, are you sure you should not *conscientiously* have complied with them?

ral religion? Whither then but to *revealed*, would you go for methods proper to appease your offended God? Shall you be at liberty to offend, and he not authorised to take vengeance on the offence, or remit the punishment due to it, on what terms he himself shall propose? But those terms, how shall they be known, but by revelation? True it is, he brought you into Being by no voluntary concurrent act or consent of your own; but, if from that arbitrary exertion of creative power in the Deity, which gave birth to the frail creature you are, you lay claim to an exemption from future misery, notwithstanding any transgressions in life, you may have fallen into; I would ask, to whom you are indebted, for the *means* afforded you, for obtaining *happiness*? And with whom lies the blame, if future *misery* is your portion? He that made you capable of sinning, enabled you at the same time, to see not only into the natural and destructive tendency of sin, but also into the unspeakable advantages of avoiding it. When two ways lie before me on my journey, I am doubtful, perhaps in my choice, whether of the two to take. One conversant in the country, says to me, Go you here, and you are sure to meet with bogs or quick-sands in your way; go you there, and you'll find a country safe, fruitful, and delightful. Whether of the two directions

is

is it most likely I shall pursue ? The latter, most assuredly, but that there are, I am told, some favourite recreations in the way, peculiar to that other road, which I would willingly indulge myself in, though at the hazard of my life. Well, I go, and am lost. To what, let me ask, but my own wayward misconduct, can you with any propriety ascribe my miscarriage ? You will urge to me, perhaps, that however man's freedom of action may be illustrated, by the case above supposed ; yet does it by no means remove the difficulties more immediately under consideration. For as futurity is present to the Deity, all those lapses which may affect my *salvation*, must necessarily have been fore-known to him, ere my mother conceived me ; how then does it consist with the supposed goodness of that Being, to bring me into a state, which he knew *would* terminate in my entire ruin ? Would it not have been more compassionately kind in him, to have let me sleep for ever, in my original state of insensibility ? A non-existence to all eternity, is more eligible, sure, than damnation to all eternity. Why then was I forced out of the calm repose of the one, when in consequence thereof, it was not only possible that I might, but certain that I should fall a sacrifice to the awakened miseries of the other ? What an errant mockery is man's boasted

boasted privilege of reflection, or a consciousness of his own existence, when it serves at last, but as a glass, wherein to view his own misery?

If the above queries are difficulties in speculation, it is, because they are not, perhaps, attended to with a proper exercise of right reason.

That God has, in every act of creation, an unalterable view to the happiness of the Being created, it is but bare justice to his name and nature to conclude: And if in any *period* of our existence, we disappoint him in so beneficent a design, what can be more agreeable to the common, and essential rules of justice, than that the disappointment should at times, be amply revenged on our own selves? We might, if we would, be partially happy *here*, and it is our own faults entirely, if we are not absolutely and completely so *hereafter*.

Thro' what variety of untried Being, it may be necessary we should *some* of us pass, e'er we arrive to the summit of that happiness intended us, nor reason, nor revelation yet declare. Nor shall I take upon me now to enquire, whether from its being asserted by the latter, that in sin *our mother did conceive us*, we may, or may not conclude, that we have passed thro' one stage of existence at least already.

The epithet *αιωνιον*, under which is represented to us, the intended duration of that state of *happiness* or *misery*, which will be portion'd out to us at the day of judgment, seems to intimate to mankind, by its being used in several places in scripture, where we know a *limited* duration was intended (1), that the latter will consist, in like manner, as will the former at *first*, of some successive periods of existence. Then cometh the end, or a period will then be put to our existence, by the measurement of time, or a various succession (*Των αιωνων*) of ages; then, in short, and not till then, eternity, if I may so express myself, will commence --- *When Christ shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority and power; for he must reign, till he hath put down all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be discharged is death; prior to which there will be, according to St. John, more than one resurrection, and more than one day of judgment and restitution. (Rev. ch. xx.)* And though scripture doth not clearly countenance the conjecture, and therefore we should be cautious, how we entertain'd the fond idea, that a state of punishment

(1) As was the case of God's promise of *Καταξιος αιωνος* to the seed of *Abraham*, which we interpret, an *everlasting* possession. Gen. xviii. 8.

will,

will, at the same time, be so far *probationals* that the sinner will even then have it in his power, to appease the *wrath* of Heaven, which, if eternal, would perhaps exclude that more amiable attribute of the Deity, his *mercy*; yet should the contrary be as cautiously maintain'd and insisted on, without full and sufficient warrant from the same inspired pages. Every state of sin will necessarily be productive of a proportionable share of misery, *present*, or to *come*; but does it therefore follow, say some, that when the offender shall cease to commit sin, he shall not receive the proper reward of that more proper conduct? May not the future punishments of sin, which will be inconceivably great and severe, give a sufficient display to God's justice, and the repentance and reformation worked thereby, open a way to his mercy? When the vengeance of heaven is become insupportable, and the sinners punishment greater than he can bear, may not reason at last take place? From the fiery furnace of affliction, may he not become purified from the dross of nature, and be quickned into affections adequate and correspondent to his celestial original, and so merit by future obedience the portion of happiness he was created for? Would not an irrevocable sentence to eternal misery, say they, imply an act of severity in the Deity, which must necessarily

break in upon his own happiness; unless we can suppose a kind of stoical apathy in the Deity, that will divest him of all affections whatever? However unaffected he may be by any *temporary* miseries his creatures may labour under, and that for their good, yet can he be alike undisturbed, with their *eternal* miseries, *not* inflicted for their good? In answer to which scheme of thinking, it is "urged, that this world is our
 "state of trial, and the present life the
 "time, in which we are to *work out our*
 "salvation; and that the scripture gives no
 "hopes, that if we neglect it, we may retrieve things in *Hades*. There are several
 "passages in the Old Testament, which are
 "inconsistent with any expectation of this
 "kind," (1) *viz. In death there is no remembrance. In the grave, who shall give thee thanks? The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence. There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest. In the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie.* But these are texts, which should by no means be urged to prove the irreversibility of our fate after death, lest they serve rather to weaken than confirm the truth of it. For must a state of punishment, which necessarily implies a state of *sensibility* and *reflec-*

(1) Vide *Horbery's* scripture doctrine of future punishments, p. 290.

tion,

tion, exclude all *future* opportunity of conversion, because we are told, that there will be no repentance in *Hades*, where there is no sensibility and reflection, no work, no device, no knowledge, no wisdom, and consequently no possibility of repenting? The above texts inform us, that the grave or the state, intermediate between death and the day of judgment, is a state of insensibility; but they by no means destroy the probability of a repentance, in that state which shall be assigned us in the *resurrection*, when we are to *receive the things done in our bodies*. But this, however, we are to observe, that if these passages do not *disprove*, yet neither are there any others in scripture, that do evidently, and, in fact, *prove* the conjecture; and therefore till we can shew, that it is an act of injustice in the Deity, to inflict eternal punishments on those, who had the *option* of eternal happiness, it will be but prudent in this case, calmly to submit our reason to the obedience of *faith*. But, to proceed,

When I parted from our author, I left him drawing from Mr. *Chandler's* declaration —
 “ that if natural religion is not a part of the
 “ religion of Christ, 'tis scarce worth while
 “ at all to enquire what his religion is,”
 (p. 6.) the following conclusion, *viz.* ---
 ‘ that then the other parts of the religion of
 ‘ Christ, are scarce worth any thing at all of

‘ our notice. So excellent, and glorious a
 ‘ part of the christian *institution*, says he,
 ‘ is true Deism : And that, notwithstanding
 ‘ all the absurdity of Dr. *Waterland’s* asser-
 ‘ tion, what he has cited from those judicious
 ‘ divines, Dr. *Sherlock* and Mr. *Chandler*,
 ‘ proves, that Deism is all in the christian
 ‘ institution, that can possibly approve itself,
 ‘ to the true genuine reason of man.”--- Our
 author’s dexterity, in thus creating patrons to
 the cause of infidelity, from among real ad-
 vocates for christianity, is extraordinary
 enough ; nor is his method of reasoning,
 throughout, less remarkable.

‘ After having said, that every thing en-
 ‘ join’d in the gospel to be believed, as a
 ‘ rational doctrine, or profess’d as a natural
 ‘ duty, relating to God, our neighbour, and
 ‘ ourselves, is an establish’d part of deism ;
 ‘ the single question, says he, between
 ‘ christians and deists, is, whether the belief
 ‘ of natural doctrines, and the practice of
 ‘ natural duties, are all that is strictly ne-
 ‘ cessary, with regard to the divine approba-
 ‘ tion ; and, consequently human happiness,
 ‘ both present and eternal.” (p. 7.) --- And,
 is this at last the case ? Is the battle be-
 tween infidels and christians, to end, after
 all, in a friendly shake of hands ? If the
 single question between christians and deists,
 is whether the belief of natural doctrines,
 and

and practice of natural duties, &c. is strictly necessary to salvation ; I here take upon me, in the name of the whole body of rational divines, to join issue with the plaintive ; and to declare, that the belief, of natural doctrines, and the practice of natural duties, is always look'd upon by *them*, as necessary, with regard to the divine approbation. And when he says, that this is a question, or doubt, that universally obtains among christians ; he advances what, from a variety of our most orthodox divines, I could prove to be not true. Nay, those duties, (*viz.* the belief of natural, &c.) are so far from being discountenanced by christianity, that they are, in fact, the very basis on which it stands ; and the only difference between christians and deists is, that the former *do* practise, or recommend to the practice of mankind, those abovementioned duties, the latter, in reality, do not. For, as I before observ'd, those doctrines are *natural* doctrines, and those duties *natural* duties, as well what appear to be med'ately, or immediately recommended by God, as what else may arise, under the character of moral doctrines, or moral duties, merely, and solely, from the suggestions of right reason. So that deists, by rejecting those doctrines and precepts, which evidently make a part of, are contained in, or may reasonably be de-

duced from the gospel institution, do manifestly oppose (and it concerns them much, to give the argument its due weight) the religion they pretend to profess; *viz.* the belief of *natural doctrines*, and the practice of *natural duties* :---In other words, the belief and practice, of the religion of reason and nature. And when I acquiesce in the *conclusion*, he draws from his six refin'd propositions, as well as the *propositions* themselves, the sum and substance of which ' is, that ' those duties only are necessary to be believed, and practised by us, the *reason* of ' which, we perceive to be founded in *nature*, and the discharge of those in the ' best manner we can, is intimately connected with our happiness, and the approbation of him, whose favour is better than ' life ; and that then, if any thing else is enjoined as a duty in any, even in the christian ' institution, it cannot be necessary to be observed, in order to eternal salvation (p. 8, ' 9."), what will follow from this very fair and honest concession, but that the christian only is the man (where christianity I mean has been taught, and is established) of true genuine religion, and that the deist is not, -- for as the sum of all religion, is the belief of natural doctrines, and the practice of natural duties ; and if those become *such*, which are either *mediately*, or *immediately*, proposed
to

to us by God, (p. 9.) how can the deist pretend to be *religious*, and reject at the same time, the pretensions of that scheme of salvation, which is built on those very principles?

Having kept pace with our author, so far as his refined definition of deism goes, and shewn, that before he proves it to be agreeable to the religion of reason and nature, he must make it coincide with the obligations of scripture and revelation; let us proceed to the examination of those difficulties, with regard to christianity, which, our author says, lie out of the *reach of our reason*, to determine of their truth or falshood; and those institutions which are confessedly *no constituent parts* of religion. (p. 12.) And here, after a formal harrangue, upon the business of the understanding, and the end of our creation; and that great caution and circumspection, which our author professes to have observed, in his enquiry after *truth*, or rather (as should seem) to rivet himself in *error*? He tells us, (p. 13.) “ that though
 “ it is said by some, that christianity is
 “ grounded on natural religion, and is an
 “ improvement of it; yet, after all that has
 “ been said to exemplify it, or that has been
 “ offered in proof of it, I cannot possibly
 “ conceive, says he, how an entire and perfect structure; (which is the case of natural
 “ religion)

“ religion) can be only a foundation for a
 “ perfect structure ; or how a perfect reli-
 “ gion can be improved ; or what is essential
 “ to man, can be but of small importance
 “ to him, in comparison of what is super-
 “ added, and to which his understanding is
 “ inadequate.” --- Tho’ our author cannot
 conceive, how a *perfect* structure, can be a
foundation for a perfect structure, will he not
 therefore allow it probable, that an *imperfect*
 structure may become the foundation of one
 that is perfect ? The *religion of reason and*
nature, I suppose *now* to consist, not only in
 the obligation of *natural duties*, strictly, or
abstractedly called such, but in such also as
 appear to be *revealed* ; that the *latter* there-
 fore may be added to the *former*, I hope
 you’ll allow possible ; and if so, that natural
 religion was not the *perfect* structure, with-
 out such addition, as with it. *Perfection*,
 is a term purely relative, and may, therefore
 oft become a comparative *imperfection*. That
 which will direct a man to an obedience *now*
 required of him, is his present *perfect* rule of
 action ; but will it be alike entire and perfect,
 where a more extensive obedience shall be
 demanded of him ? Will it not necessarily
call for some *superadded* notices and instruc-
 tions, proportioned to the superadded du-
 ties ? And may not what was once *essential*
 to him, merely as *man*, be of small im-
 portance

portance to him, when compared with that superadded system of duties, prescribed to him as a *christian*?

But, observe with what solemn absurdity our author again amuses his readers, and imposes on their easy credulity.--- Having ventured to tell us with an air, he would have interpreted into a *well grounded* confidence, that what he *asserts*, is most infallibly *true*; and that his present sentiments, may very properly be “ termed deism, as *that* imports
“ the religion of things, and not of unmeaning, or many meaning words, --- of the
“ heart, but not of the book; it is not nominal, but real deism, says he, I now intend; and, by which I would fain be understood, to mean that religion, which
“ consists of only such doctrines and precepts, as appear to have their *foundation*
“ *in reason and nature*,” (p. 13.); and then having attempted to shew, that christianity is not *that* kind of religion, he vouchsafes to tell us, as he is coming to the point, (p. 14.) well knowing that he was then evidently the farthest from it, when he seem’d *endeavouring* to be nearest. Well, and what after all *is* the *point*? Why, I think, says he,
“ that the grand foundation of the difference
“ betwixt deists, and the religious of all other
“ persuasions, is, whether any doctrine or
“ precept, that has not its foundation apparently

“rently in reason and nature, can be of the
 “essence of religion, and with propriety be
 “said, to be a religious doctrine or pre-
 “cept (p. 14.).”

Among the religious of all denominations, the christian surely must be understood to make *one*. I would then gladly know of our author, *who* those christians are, who assert that doctrines and precepts, which have not their foundation apparently in reason and nature, are the essence of christianity, and, with propriety may be said, to be a religious doctrine or precept? Or *wherein* do they *teach* doctrines, that apparently have not their foundation in reason and nature? If he goes to the determination of councils and synods, tis a chance but he's right. And yet even *then*, he may be altogether as distant from the point in debate, as were their *infallible* decisions too frequently from the *truth*. Search the *scriptures*, and let me see him prove from *thence*, a sanction to absurdities, of that, or any other kind, and I'll not wonder at his treating them with so little ceremony and respect. Till he can do that, he is fighting with a shadow; and unless he is willing or *able*, to argue from the *original* sense, and *general* tenour of holy writ, he dictates with a mighty ill grace, in the concerns of revelation. But, to proceed.

“ The

“ The whole body of christians, says our
 “ author, may be ranked under the two fol-
 “ lowing classes, 1st. Those who maintain
 “ that doctrines and practices which have no
 “ foundation in reason or nature, may be of
 “ the essence of religion ; and 2^{dly}. Those
 “ who maintain that doctrines and practices,
 “ which do not *apparently appear* (pray ob-
 “ serve his expressions, for they are incom-
 “ parably *expressive*) to be founded in nature
 “ and reason, may yet, notwithstanding, be
 “ of the essence of religion (p. 14.).”

That we may not, for want of *method*,
 confound our author's distinct arrangement
 of christian writers, and the separate classes
 in which he has placed them, we will bring
 each of them under its proper separate ex-
 amination. In order to which, it may be
 necessary, in the first place, to take a view
 of the *names* of those who make up the
first class of christian writers. And here,
 lest you should too hastily *expect* to see it
 compos'd of *all*, or even any of *such christian*
writers, as had obtain'd the greatest reputa-
tion, both for sound judgment, and nervous
reasoning (p. 2.). I must charge you, as
 you value the credit and reputation of your
 author, to be *satisfied* with the single, tho'
 singular testimony, of one *Zeglövius*, a
Dutch writer. --- One *good* evidence to a rea-
 sonable man, is as satisfactory as a thousand.--
 And

And, he (Mynheer Zeglovius) is pleased, it seems, to affirm, "that God may, if he
 "pleases, out of the vast sovereignty of his
 "will, command all that wickedness, which
 "he has forbidden, and make it our duty ;
 "and also forbid all that holiness, which
 "he has commanded, and make it sin to
 "us (p. 15.)."

The extraordinariness of the doctrine above quoted, it is just as necessary for me to enquire into, as it was for our author to introduce it, --- and that is not at all ; --- unless he could prove, that in *that*, is comprehended the united sense of the whole body of christian writers. And, if that in fact is the case, how comes he to have been so sparing in his quotations ? I should rather have expected, he would triumphantly have usher'd in a few *English divines*, of *sound judgment and nervous reason*, to have bore his *Dutchman* company. But, for want of this single circumstance alone, what he has built on his *first* class of christian writers, rises but to a most magnificent castle in the air : --- Let us see then, if he is more happy and successful in his *second*.

"Those christians of the second class, he
 "says, so far agree with the deists, as to
 "own, that God, who is infinite in know-
 "ledge, and can never know things to be
 "otherwise than they are in themselves,
 cannot

“ cannot possibly consider, nor constitute any
 “ doctrine or precept, to be of the essence
 “ of religion, which is not so in itself, as
 “ not being founded in truth and reason
 “ (p. 15). ”

This being a reflection, just expressive of
 common sense and understanding, our au-
 thor is pleased to make it the distinguishing
 characteristick of the *second* class of christi-
 ans ; and, what is more, --- to compliment
 it, with the *deists* solemn sanction and appro-
 bation. --- And yet no sooner are they thus
 happily and amicably join'd together, than
 (most unfortunately) a cruel *but*, sets them at
 once asunder.

“ They agree, says our author, with the
 “ deists, in owning, that God who is infi-
 “ nite in knowledge, and can never know
 “ things to be otherwise than they are in
 “ themselves, cannot possibly consider, nor
 “ constitute any doctrine or precept, to be
 “ of the essence of religion, which is not so
 “ in itself. --- *But* then they agree, as the
 “ religion of nature, thus absolutely confi-
 “ dered, and in its full extent, is only known
 “ to God, if he should be pleas'd to make
 “ a *supernatural* revelation, of such parts of
 “ that law to us, which our *unassisted* reason
 “ could never have discover'd ; *such* a revela-
 “ tion ought to be gratefully received, and
 “ readily acknowledged. And this, he tells
 “ us,

“ us, we alledge to be the case of all specu-
 “ lative, metaphysical, and sublime doc-
 “ trines contained in the scriptures, which
 “ collectively compose the christian faith
 (“ p. 16.).”

And where, let me ask, lies the absurdity, in this case? Our author grants, that God cannot *possibly* consider, or constitute any doctrine or precept, to be of the essence of religion, which is not so of itself: Why then should he not acknowledge those things, to be of the very essence of religion, which we suppose him actually to *have* consider'd, *constituted, and appointed*; though they be even such things, as our *unassisted reason* could not have discovered to have been so. His first concession, supposes every thing *ap- pointed* by God, to be truly consistent with religion, and consequently, that it is unnatural and irreligious, to oppose what he has appointed (p. 16.).

Ah! but, says he, they (*i. e.* the rational christians) they, says he, go farther still, than all this: For *they* say, “ tho’ no doc-
 “ trine that has not its *foundation* in reason
 “ and nature, can be truly a religious doc-
 “ trine, yet doctrines, that *have* such a
 “ foundation, (though that does not appear)
 “ may, if God pleases, be communicated to
 “ us, either by himself immediately, or me-
 “ diately by his agents, without any reflec-
 “ tion

"tion on, or repugnancy to any one of his
 "attributes (p. 16.)."

The unfairness of this representation of christianity, is, I presume, obvious enough to every one, that thinks not, or writes not, with the partiality of our author. For all that the men of any importance in the great business of explaining scripture truths; in other words, --- all that the *rational* divines have advanced on this point, is, that it is no argument of *weak* credulity, or an *irrational* foundation of our faith, if some proposed objects of our belief are found, in a few *particulars* thereof *not* revealed, to lie beyond the *reach* of our enquiries; that things in *this* respect, may be incomprehensible, and yet not *incompatible* with reason, or the intention of revelation. The errors and absurdities, which either popery, or enthusiasm, may have unwarrantably ingrafted on christianity, and which, have undoubtedly no foundation in reason and nature, affect not the original and real merit of the latter; and it must be ignorance, or downright knavery in a writer, to charge them upon the faith of christians, without *exception*.

But, having so very justly and *judiciously* stated the case in difference, between *us* and deists; observe the conclusion, he *as* justly and judiciously draws from it. "The difference, says he, betwixt rational chri-

" Christians and deists, will, without any farther
 " trouble, be adjusted, when this propo-
 " sition, which christians lay down for a cer-
 " tain truth," viz. " that the collections of
 " writings, commonly called the scriptures,
 " are of divine inspiration, and a revelation
 " from God to mankind, --- be plainly, and
 " clearly made appear to be so; and there-
 " fore the material question depends upon
 " the proof that is to be made by christians,
 " that the scriptures are a divine revelation,
 " and the very word of God. For if that
 " point be proved, says he, the controversy
 " is at an end, there being no true deist, that
 " will hesitate a moment to allow, that what
 " God saith, is truth (p. 16, 17, 18.)."
 Which is declaring, in as express terms as
 can be imagined, that if christians can but
 once prove to us, that the scriptures are really
 of divine original, and authority, we deists
 will absolutely acquiesce in all those doctrines
 that are deduced therefrom, even tho' they
 appear not to have their foundation in *rea-
 son, and the nature of things.*

Here then you see the ultimate resolu-
 tion of our deist. If you will not suffer
 him to enjoy in peace the maxims of infi-
 delity and deism, he will, rather than become
 a *true* christian, be content to be a papist, or
 enthusiast. For who but such as *those*, pre-
 tend to ground the obligation of believing
 things,

things, not founded in *reason* and the *nature* of things, on any pretended authority from holy writ? But passing by the compliment here paid by our author to popery, enthusiasm, and superstition, let us attend him in his pretendedly impartial enquiry, into the divine *authority* of the scriptures, which he puts us to the proof of. "Alas! alas! says he, here we have a surprizing instance of the want of *unanimity* among christians, where it seems to be so peculiarly requisite, that *without* it, they must not only expect to fail of convincing deists of the truth of their cause, but also render it a doubtful point, whether they are rationally convinced of the truth of it themselves. For if we begin with the Roman catholicks, who have vastly the advantage, in point of numbers, and plainly ask *them*, how know you the scripture to be the word of God? --- They answer, by the testimony of the church (p. 18.)."

Now I would venture to appeal to any man, of common sense and understanding, whether the popish method of proving the *sense* of scripture, from the *implicit* testimony of their church, is of any weight in our author's arguments, for disproving the scriptures to be the word of God. Nay, he acknowledges, that the weakness and absurdity of this method of proof, has been so fully

shewn by some eminent *protestants*, as to render it perfectly needless for deists to make any repetition of what is so generally known and approved (p. 19.) What a trifler then, even from his own confession, is my worthy friend the deist? --- But now for the principal answers, vouchsafed to us by *protestants* --- “ Why the one part, says he, “ maintain, that they are known to be the “ word of God by *themselves*, to those *only*, “ whose eyes the spirit of God is pleased in a “ distinguishing manner to open, to *perceive* “ the certain characters of divine truths in “ them (p. *ib.*). Another sort maintain, “ that they are known, and will manifestly “ appear to be the word of God by *themselves*, upon an honest investigation of “ mere natural reason, to any man who “ shall impartially exercise it about them “ (p. *ib.*).” --- Now, as a fresh instance of our author’s usual impartiality, and honest method of reading such christian writers, as should be found to obtain the *greatest reputation for sound judgment, and nervous reading*, (p. 2.) we have, in support of his charge, against the *one part* of protestant divines, a quotation here, from the all-sufficient authority of one Mr. *Pemle*. Who Mr. *Pemle* is, I confess I know not. But our author, I presume, concluding, that one *single* advocate in some cases is better than none at all,

2

determin’d,

determin'd, as the *Tillotson's*, the *Sharp's*, &c. were council retain'd on the other side, boldly to risk his fate on the weight and authority of Mr. *Pemle* (1). --- Well then, it appearing most *unquestionably* true, from what Mr. *Pemle* has advanced, notwithstanding what all the great men have to say to the contrary; that --- "we know the
 " scriptures to be the word of God, by
 " *themselves*, --- is an answer of a party of
 " *protestants*, to the question above, --- how
 " know you the scriptures to be the word of
 " God? The Roman *catholicks* in *their* turn,
 " says our author, reply, that scripture is
 " delivered to most protestants, by transla-
 " tions from men, who by their *contrary*
 " *translations*, have proved themselves falli-
 " ble; therefore granting, that the originals
 " be true, the translations may be far other-
 " wise, at least, only one can be the true
 " one, and which must that be?" --- Why,
 that which you have the best and most *rea-*
sonable evidence for. --- Because " alterations in
 " language, are, as our author avers, unavoid-
 G 3 able

(1) Mr. *Pemle*, in his treatise of grace and faith says, We know the scriptures are the word of God by *themselves*, the spirit of God *opening* our eyes to see those natural and lively characters of divine truth which are imprinted on those sacred volumes. But how (he asks a little after) does the Holy Ghost reveal unto us the truth of scripture? (He answers,) By removing those impediments that hinder, and bestowing those graces, illumination, and sanctification, that make us capable of this knowledge. (Vid. our author, p. 19. 20.)

“able (p. 21.); must there therefore of course,
 “be no such thing as *true* language?” But then,
 says our author, “As they might possibly be
 “corrupted by transcribers, and we cannot
 “be certain that they were not, the scrip-
 “tures, says he, in those latter ages, cannot
 “be proved to be the word of God, by
 “*themselves*. For shall we know them to
 “be so, by their own testimony, concerning
 “themselves, or by the reasonableness and
 “apparent truth of each and all the doctrines
 “and precepts contained in them? (p. 21.)

If by the testimony of scripture concerning
themselves, our author had meant nothing
 more than a testimony arising from the rea-
 sonableness of their doctrines and precepts,
 I would ask him, whether the reasonableness
 of a doctrine is not one of the strongest, tho'
 not the *sole* argument to be expected in sup-
 port of its credibility and authority? “Well,
 “but, says he, the assurance of the infallibi-
 “lity and inspiration of the several authors
 “of those books called the Bible, is the very
 “point in question, and requires to be prov-
 “ed.” Where again he subjoins this very
 shrewd remark, (as if it had been a point of
 universal *dispute* among christians) that its
 own testimony, concerning itself, can be no
 proper evidence. (p. 22.)

He is in too great a hurry to ask us, whe-
 ther we have or have not any other proof of the
 the

the inspiration of the authors of those books called the Bible, than what arises from its *own* testimony concerning themselves, well knowing that we have many: for one of which I must refer you to a note below (1), lest I should lose sight of my author in his hasty transition to the *second* kind of proof of the divine authority of the holy scriptures, *viz.* the reasonableness and apparent truth of each of its doctrines and precepts respectively. “ This, says he, is not so much as pretended by *those* protestants whose answer “ we are now particularly considering.” Well, and how can we help it if they are not? Are the fanciful suggestions of every trifling

(1) Not to insist upon other arguments, which might be alledged with great strength and cogency of reason; that compleat system of morals, which gives so great a lustre to their writing, is, I think, a sufficient proof that the evangelists, and the rest of the sacred penmen of the New Testament, were divinely inspired; 'tis true indeed, there is scarce any one precept therein contained, but what may be met with in the writings of the heathen philosophers, but then they are so detach'd from one another, and so destitute of a proper sanction to enforce them, and are so defac'd by a monstrous heap of absurdities, which are deliver'd along with them, that they fall far short of that perfection which ought to be expected, to make them come home to men's purposes, and render them of general use. Whereas, in the scriptures, all the doctrines are sum'd up in a plain and easy manner, and in a small compass, free from any embarrass, and at the same time that they exhibit to us a full rule of duty to God, our neighbour, and our selves, have all the authority that either reason or revelation can give, to recommend them, and are enforced by such proper sanctions, as must necessarily have a great weight upon every sober and well disposed mind.—

enthusiastic zealot to be charged to the account of the whole body of christian writers & ---As well may we assert, that there is no such thing in the world as right reason, because our author, whilst he pretends to espouse it, shews so little of it in his writings. But to proceed,

“*They, (i. e. Mr. Pemble,) esteem meer morality, and the bare exercise of our natural powers in matters of religion, altogether ineffectual with regard to salvation: Things beyond morality, and out of the verge of human reason, they are so well assured are not to be acquired by reason, that they ascribe the acquisition of them wholly to the operation of the Holy Ghost.*” (p. *ibid.*) Do they so? and what then? Do *they* (*viz.* that body of protestants represented by Mr. Pemble) declare, that meer morality, or the bare exercise of our natural powers in matters of religion, is altogether ineffectual, with regard to salvation? Why then give me leave, if you please, to explain the *meaning* of that declaration. It is this, *viz.* that meer morality, *i. e.* that kind of morality, which is falsely call’d such --- a morality, that would exclude revelation from the religion of *right reason*, --- the morality in fact of deists, --- that such kind of morality will be ineffectual to salvation. To the truth of which, I myself can very readily subscribe ;

subscribe ; as will, I believe, every rational
 divine you can name me, --- and not only
 this, but they will agree with Mr. *Chandler*,
 that " the religion of Christ must be *under-*
 " *stood*, before it can, or ought to be believed,
 " and that it must be proved to be a consistent
 " and rational religion; before a man can be
 " under any obligation to receive it."

When therefore our author took upon him to
 assert from the one example of Mr. *Pem-
 ble*, that this is not so much as pretended by any
 established body of divines, --- (p. 23.) and
 that none but such as Mr. *Chandler*, were so
 rational as to maintain that opinion, he does
 not do justice to the church of *England* cler-
 gy. If they declare that a man must be *su-
 pernaturnally* illuminated, in order to perceive
 the characters of divine truth in the holy
 scriptures, what more do they mean, than
 that a man must cherish in his breast some
 thing superior to the too *natural* dispositions
 and bias of an infidel ; something more than
 the suggestions of pride, prejudice, and par-
 tiality, and what is too usually substituted in
 the place of natural *reason*, to judge rightly
 of the truth of revelation. Nor is *Chilling-
 worth*, as our author would insinuate, the
 only great man among the several patrons of
 christianity, who cares to own that " natural
 " *reason* is the only true judge in those con-
 " troverfies,

“troverfies, where the fcripture itfelf is the
“ fubject of them (p. 24.)”

Mr. *Locke* fays, that without the evidence and ufe of reafon, men cannot be able to diftinguifh divine revelation from diabolical impoftures. (1)

Mr. *Hales*, fpeaking of the *laity* of the 2d century, --- obferves, That one great caufe of error was, that the people, thro’ floth and blind obedience, *examined* not the things that were taught, but like beafts of burden, patiently couched down, and indifferently underwent whatever their fuperiors laid upon them. (2)

Mr. *Bullock* fays, if I cannot depend upon the plainefl dictates of reafon, how can I be affured that any doctrine is a revelation from God. If I receive it without confulting my reafon, then for aught I know, it may be an impofture, and I am every way as liable to embrace an error as the truth. (3)

Bifhop *Taylor* has well obferv’d, ’tis reafon that is the judge, and fathers, councils, tradition and fcripture the evidence. (4)

Mr. *Chillingworth*, archbifhops *Tillotfon* and *Sharp*, bifhops *Burnet* and *Wilkins*, Dr. *Scot*, and indeed, all our ableft divines

(1) Vide *Locke* on human underftanding, vol. II. chap. 18.

(2) Vide *Hale’s* tract of fchifm.

(3) Vide *Bullock’s* fermons, page 19.

(4) Lib. I. chap. 2.

agree,

agree, that we ought to make use of our reason, to inform us of the truth of any pretended revelation, and to enable us to understand the doctrines which it teaches. --- You see then, that by the united testimony of men of the greatest reputation for *sound learning*, &c. that reason was never meant to be excluded from our enquiries into either the subject matter, or authority of revelation. Nor does it appear, that even what we call *supernatural* matters, or, what seems to us to come from scripture as such, are incapable of being examined into, and judged of by that rule, --- “ for *supernatural* matters “ are what our author charges us with the “ belief of, upon scripture authority (p. “ 24.).” The charge, I say, we’ll admit; and let our author make from it what advantages he can.--- Why, *says* he; “ Matters *supernatural*, are incapable of an examination by *natural* reason, and therefore are “ incapable of being apparently reasonable, “ or being *approved* of as such,” by our reasoning faculties, (p. *ib.*) --- If meer confident assertions were equivalent to real argument, I know not who would merit more, as a writer, than our author. Supernatural matters, *says* he, are incapable of an examination by natural reason. But wherefore? Why must it necessarily be beyond the reach of natural reason, to acquiesce in the doctrine and declaration

clation of truths that were once *supernatural*, or beyond the conception, or invention of the original strength of reason? Truths that *still* lie out of the reach of human conception, of which sort, there are undoubtedly not a few, are, and will be *supernatural* till revealed. But will it therefore follow, that *when* discovered they become not objects of our natural reason and examination? What I was not *able* to discover of myself (and all men were once upon the same footing, with respect to some particular truths they were afterwards made acquainted with) was surely a *supernatural* discovery to *me*, when made by another person; and cannot my reason, do you think, enable me to determine rightly, concerning the truth, falsehood, or probability, of what I was thus *supernaturally* made acquainted with? And our author, will he dare to say, that even *Chillingworth*, and our other rational divines are gravell'd, when they come to the discussion of this, what he calls, unmanageable point; and at a loss to prove, that the scriptures are known to be the word and revelation of God, upon an *honest* investigation of meer natural reason? (p. 25.) And shall he, with a sneer, talk of a thing 'being what it is, and 'more than it is at the same time? And of a 'man's having the understanding of a man, and

‘and yet discerning what is out of the reach
 ‘of human intellectual faculties to perceive?’
 (p. 2.) Why must the evidence of superna-
 tural truths considered as above (and what
 other kind of *supernaturals* are there, but
 meer *contradictions* and *inconsistences*, which
 our church absolutely disclaims?) Why must
 the evidence of supernatural truths really,
 and in fact such, be necessarily out of the
 reach of natural powers?

But not to dwell any longer on the evi-
 dence arising from the *internal* characters of
 the divine pages, let us hear what our author
 would object to those their *external* ones,
 prophecies and miracles. “These, he thinks,
 “even when we have reckoned up all the
 “prophecies given by *Sybils*, *Jews*, or *Chri-*
 “*stians*, or miracles at any time wrought,
 “fall vastly short of affording the proof or
 “*satisfaction* to be *expected*. For *they* never,
 “he says, can *prove* that the collection of
 “tracts, commonly call’d the Bible, were
 “written by the persons respectively whose
 “names they bear; that the Deity imme-
 “diately dictated to, and impress’d upon the
 “mind of each writer, the subject matter
 “contain’d therein, effectually restraining
 “each one from mixing his own conceptions
 “with what had been thus dictated to him;
 “and that these books have been faithfully
 “transmitted

“transmitted from their original copies;
 “down to us without any corruption, alter-
 “ation, addition, or diminution; and then
 “if prophecies and miracles fall short of
 “proving these points, which most certainly
 “they do, *then consequently* they fall equally
 “short of proving the scriptures to be a di-
 “vine revelation, and the very word of God:
 “(p. 26.)” Observe now, with what *syl-*
logistic-sagacity our author attempts to reason
 away the authority of holy writ. Because
 the divine *original* of the *scriptures* cannot be
 proved by a medium, which it was never in-
 tended it should be proved by, *therefore*, it is
 not capable of being proved at all. --- He
 supposes that miracles and prophecies given
 forth by christians, jews, and sybils, are *ur-*
ged to prove, in the first place, that the scrip-
 tures were written by the very persons whose
 names they bear; and secondly, that these
 persons were inspired, and infallible in every
 word they wrote. --- Now, if that be the
 case, he can surely produce some prophecies,
 given *forth* by jews, sybils, and christians,
 and miracles somewhere wrought, which
 christians *refer* to, as what were expressly
 given, or done for that very end. Till he
 does that, his charge is groundless, insignifi-
 cant, and impertinent. But if he means to
 say, that prophecies actually *accomplish’d*,
 and miracles really known to be worked by
 those

those very persons under whose names the *scriptures* are said to be wrote, are, added to the intrinsic merit of their doctrines, urged as giving a probability of their divine original and authenticity, he supposes the very fact. And if these such corroborating evidences of their divine authority, do not stamp conviction in *his* breast, we may fairly conclude, that it is too callous for its reception, even tho' one should *rise from the dead* to assure him of it. And tho' *miracles* and *prophecies* do fall short of proving, that these books have been *faithfully transmitted* from their respective original copies down to us, without any corruption, alteration, addition, or diminution, what is that to his purpose, unless he can prove that they ever were *appeal'd* to for that end? *Parts, learning, and integrity*, are the usual requisites recommended for the discovery and removal of any difficulties of this kind, which the *scriptures* in common with other writings may reasonably be presumed to be subject to. And had our author possess'd an equal share of the *latter*, with his perhaps just pretensions to the *former* of those qualifications, he would not have sunk thus low in the esteem of impartial men, as a reasoner on revealed truths. But to proceed.

Our author seems very sagaciously to imagine, that we must first prove every *tittle*
of

of the writings of the Old and New Testament to be penn'd by immediate inspiration, and that the penmen deliver to us *nothing* but what was actually dictated to them by the Deity, e'er we can pretend to recommend these books to the world, as an established repository of revelation. But this, let me tell him, was neither necessary nor intended. The *infallible testimony* the several writers themselves receiv'd, and did afterward give to the truth of the particular facts they relate, is sufficient to give them credit as *authors*, with every impartial reader and enquirer; even allowing them, at the same time, the general fallibility of nature as men. In order to do justice to revelation, we should be careful to distinguish rightly the *man* from the *minister* of revealed truths; the historian from the prophet; nor expect inspiration, where inspiration was not pretended to. Some things are proposed to us in scripture, as necessary objects of our *faith*; some more especially for proper guides to our moral *practice*. Of the first sort, are those particulars which the prophets and apostles received, by either an articulate sound from heaven, or by visions, and other supernatural appearances, or by prophetic suggestions of the divine spirit; the truth of which, they either sealed with their blood, or confirm'd by extraordinary miracles. Nor will it be at all difficult

difficult to distinguish truths advanced upon the authority of *inspiration*, and those which are recommended only on the foot of reflection and natural reasoning, --- or as matters merely historical. The sacred writers, by a more serious and sincere examination into the real truth of things, added to the many extraordinary lights they from time to time receiv'd, furnish out to us a more noble treasure of useful doctrines and maxims, than are to be drawn from the most elaborate researches of other men, the observance of which they enforce by the discovery of many important truths *super-natural* --- truths not attainable by *natural reason*, which, and which *alone*, were the subject of their inspiration. Out of the four Evangelists, two of them were eye and ear witnesses of what they relate, *viz.* St. *Matthew* and St. *John*. Did they need *inspiration*, do you think, to make them write as honest men? If so, a man is a fool to believe one word of *English*, *Greek*, or *Roman* history? The two others wrote confessedly by the directions and instruction of St. *Peter* and St. *Paul*; and were equally capable of writing with historical honesty and integrity, as the former. So that it is not so necessary for the credibility of scripture story, as our author would insinuate, that the subject matter thereof in general, should be impressed on the minds

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of each writer; and every thing therein penn'd, be the result of actual immediate inspiration.

According to our present *translation* indeed, it is said, all scripture is given by inspiration, and is profitable for doctrine, &c. 2 Tim. chap. iii. v. 16. But the text in the original, says manifestly no such thing. Even the very pointing of the words prove against it. - *πασα γραφη, θεοπνευστος, και ωφελιμος.* - How it will consist with the common rules of criticism, to make *γραφη* the noun to govern *εστι* understood, and *θεοπνευστος*, to be govern'd of it with the intervention of a *comma*, I own, I am not able to make out. But put *θεοπνευστος* in apposition with *γραφη* and the intermediate *comma* is sufficiently accounted for. Let the following *και* too be render'd *etiam*, as it is in a thousand places besides, and immediately after it, let *εστι* be understood, and the sense is at once made clear, and will run thus--- All scripture, given by inspiration, is *even* profitable for doctrine, &c.

The Apostle's meaning from which words, is, that all scripture given by inspiration, *i. e.* every *prophetic part* of scripture, every prophecy given, or declaration made by those several inspired teachers and prophets, is a memento to our rational and moral conduct; and if attended to as it ought, would be profitable

fitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, &c.

But to return. " Our author cannot conceive how plain and *obvious* truths can be reveal'd, in a miraculous and *supernatural* manner (*ib.*)". And where, I would ask, is it required of him that he should? What more is proposed to our belief, than that some plain and *obvious* truths (truths which are the immediate object of even *natural* reason and religion,) that these are by the gospel enforced by some *other supernatural* doctrines. --- *i. e.* Doctrines so supernaturally made known to us, as that reason alone could not *naturally* have attained to the knowledge of them---Such as God's creating, with a view of hereafter judging the world by *Jesus Christ*, his sending that very divine person among us, who one day is to be our judge, to be first our teacher and instructor, that by his life and conversation, he might approve himself a compleat pattern of *virtue* and *holiness* here, and by his death and resurrection, give *assurance* that he came to open to us a way to perfect bliss hereafter.

Are these, I would ask, intelligible doctrines, or are they not? And may they, or may they not be admitted into our creed, without offering any violence to our understanding? Let me, for the present, suppose our author to answer in the affirmative, and

to admit that they are worthy and valuable truths, deserving our veneration and regard. But what then? "It cannot appear to me, says he, that they were therefore miraculously, and supernaturally revealed; because in the *first* place, they have not been proved to be so, and *secondly*, because they are to be discovered to be what they are by the human understanding, in the ordinary and natural use of its faculties. (p. *ib.*)" Here I must lay before you another instance of our author's great talent for sophistry and false reasoning and his dexterity too in substituting splendid nonsense in the room of real argument. In the first place, nothing is to be admitted in proof of revelation, but what our author himself is pleased to acquiesce in. Secondly; Things cannot be discovered to be what they *are*, by our understanding, and the ordinary and natural use of our faculties, if they were at first made known to the world in a miraculous and supernatural manner. Our author's reasoning thus on this point, I impute to his confounding the *nature* of revelation truths, with the *manner* of their being convey'd. He imagines, that every truth must be in fact, supernatural, *i. e.* not capable of being known to be what it is, by the *natural* use of our reasoning faculties, even *when* discovered, provided it was made known in a manner

ner supernatural. He that sees not into the fallacy of this deduction, must be but little qualified to judge of the force or fallacy of any argument at all. --- But again. "As to
 "all the mysterious and unintelligible parts
 "of scripture, they are the same, says our
 "author, as if they were not, as to any good
 "purpose that can be served by them; and
 "to suppose that they give forth unintelligi-
 "ble instructions and propositions to his crea-
 "tures, is to prove God, in fact, a mere
 "trifler." -- If by mysterious unintelligible
 propositions, our author means such things
 only, whose *manner* and *form* of existence
 are unintelligible, let him but consider, how
 many mysteries there are of that kind, in the
 system of natural religion; and then judge,
 whether any but such arrant triflers as *him-
 self*, will pretend to oppose them to the
 prejudice of revelation. Whether or no any
other unintelligible propositions have the pre-
 tended sanction of revelation, I may perhaps
 enquire, as I go along with our author's an-
 swer to Dr. Benson's reply to the *author of
 christianity not founded on argument*; which
 seems principally to have been the occasion
 of this very extraordinary treatise. The rea-
 son for it is very obvious. *That* being a book,
 on the credit of which, the very life and
 soul of infidelity seem'd principally to de-
 pend, it was necessary, that an answer so ap-

parently conclusive, as that of Dr. *Benson's*, should not pass upon the world, without meeting somewhere with an *attempt* at least, towards a reply. But how disproportion'd our author's abilities are to his *endeavours*, to overturn the sound reasoning of Dr. *Benson*, we shall easily see, by the few following observations, --- which I offer not in the least in defence, or vindication (1) of the latter, (for he stands in no need of any) but to expose the gross sophistry of the former. The Dr. speaks truth, honesty, and integrity in every page, and flashes unwilling conviction even in the very face of our author, --- as appears from the various subterfuges he is forced to take shelter in.

Dr. *Benson* having asserted, that the rational divines prove all things, and hold fast that which is good, and that what is good in all cases, may readily be distinguished from what is evil, (2) “the inference which our sagacious author draws therefrom, is, that “in mere matters of morality, only reason “can readily distinguish what is morally

(1). Lest the Dr. should be made to answer for any possible deficiencies, that may be observable in this reply to his antagonist, let the reader take notice, that Dr. *Benson* knows nothing of either the defender or the defence; and that what occurs herein, is purely the result of an unprejudiced and impartial examination into the merits of the cause he took in hand.

(2) Vide *Benson's* reasonableness of christian religion. p.

‘good,

“ good, from what is morally evil, so such
 “ matters only can, he says, according to
 “ Dr. *Benson*, be cases of importance, that
 “ is, with regard to the favour of God, and
 “ eternal salvation (p. 31.)”. Here our au-
 thor thinks he has drawn such a conclusion
 from Dr. *Benson*’s way of reasoning, as must
 necessarily bring him under difficulties insur-
 mountable, and disable him from proving
 matters of faith, to be matters of importance.
 But I would ask, whether it is not the united
 sense of the whole body of rational divines,
 that morality is the principal end of christia-
 nity? And if so, must not the means con-
 duce thereto, such as are its articles of faith,
 and positive precepts, be proportionally im-
 portant too? (*vide supra*. p. 47.) And can you,
 I would ask, separate with any manner of
 propriety a *belief* of truths revealed by the
 immediate direction of God, (and not *natural*
 objects, perhaps, of our notice) from the
 catalogue of *moral* duties? But “ how, says
 “ our author, does it appear, that the grand
 “ articles of christianity, when they are now
 “ no more to be judged of by human
 “ powers, than they were before to be found
 “ out by them, are matters of importance?
 “ And how can things with propriety, be
 “ said to be reveal’d to the human race, of
 “ which man has no faculty of forming an
 “ adequate idea or judgment? (p. 34.) What

gave occasion to this query, was, Dr. Ben-
 son's insinuating, that without the scripture,
 reason, or men's natural faculties, would
 never have found out many things that are
 revealed in the Bible. (1) It may be true,
 that many things revealed to us in the gos-
 pel, could not have been *found* out by the
 unassisted powers of human reason; but, as I
 observ'd before (p. 90.) no conclusion can be
 drawn from thence, that now they *are* dis-
 covered, they become not objects of our ex-
 amination and enquiry. Till this can be dis-
 proved, the above cavil falls ingloriously to
 the ground. But then, says he, "to talk of
 " a revelation of things to man, in aid of
 " reason, which though easily understood,
 " yet reason cannot discover any proper use
 " that can be made of them, is alike absurd
 " and contradictory. But so absurd and con-
 " tradictory a declaration is this, says he, that
 " God will judge the world, by Jesus Christ.
 " This, says he, does not appear to have any
 " foundation in reason or nature; nor is
 " there any principle or premises from whence
 " they may be drawn. God will judge the
 " world in righteousness, and it is a matter of
 " indifference to the creature by *whom*. And
 " as reason cannot make any improvement
 " of this doctrine, how can it be said, with
 " either propriety or truth, that it was given
 " in aid of it. (p. 35.)"

(1) Vide Ben. p. 90, 91.

Because

Because our *author* can make no improvement of this doctrine, is it therefore evident that no body else can? --- Or that what he himself has been pleased to advance on that head, does actually proceed from the suggestions of *reason*, and not rather from some principle which best suits him, for the present, to substitute in its room? Is it not some confirm'd prejudice, some inveterate obstinacy lying in the way *between* reason and conviction, which hinders *him* from reaping that advantage from the *declaration* of God's judging the world, by Jesus Christ that he might? "Admitting
 " it to be a truth, that God will judge the
 " world by Jesus Christ, of what more consequence to the world in general, says he,
 " is the knowledge of this truth, than that
 " there being a burning mountain in the
 " kingdom of *Naples*, is an advantage to the
 " people of *England*? Then this is a just objection, says he, against the divinity of
 " this doctrine, because it is greatly improbable, that God should specially interpose to
 " acquaint the world with this, or any other
 " truth, the knowledge of which, mankind
 " would do altogether as well without. (p. *ib.*)"

--There can be no stronger argument, of the desperate state of our author's cause, than the mean artifices, he thinks it necessary to have recourse to for its support. Like a fox well nigh run down by his pursuers, and unable any longer

ger to trust to a fair and open chace, he begins to practise, at last, all the little shifts and doubles he can make, to protract, tho' but for a moment, the fate he is too sensible he must submit to. --- Had this circumstance of God's judging the world by *Jesus Christ*, been omitted, and nothing more had been observed, concerning the *distribution* of rewards and *punishments* in another state, then that in fact, such a state would one time or another commence, how natural would it have been for men to have enquired how it came to pass, that revelation, whose principal business and boasted merit it is, to make such more full discoveries, than reason could attain to, should yet say nothing more concerning this important point of religion, than what perhaps might be deduced from the principles of natural reason?

The time *when*, the manner *how*, and the person by *whom* this grand affair is at last to be conducted, are circumstances of information, which every *right-reasoner* would naturally have expected of revelation; --- nor do I believe, that even the deists would have been the last to have complain'd of such deficiency. And if such be their harden'd insensibility and ingratitude, as that, instead of its being a motive to their praise and thanksgiving, they make this so material a discovery, an additional argument to support them
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in their presumptuous infidelity.--I judge them not, --- there is one that judgeth, --- even that same Jesus whom they despise.

As for those twelve propositions, which our author has introduced with such an air of solemnity and importance, it may be but justice to him, and to the reader, to transcribe them, that the latter may make what advantage from them he can. (p. 37, 38, 39, 40.) (1) I own, that I thought eleven out of the

(1) 1. That the first cause of all things is a Being, not only of the most boundless power, but also of the most unlimited and perfect reason or understanding.

2. That in nature, there is the right and the wrong, of every case that can possibly exist, or result from the infinitely various positions and modifications of either simple or complex ideas, propositions, or things, at least, of all those cases, that right and wrong can possibly be relative to.

3. It may fairly be presumed, that infinite reason is alone capable of distinguishing unerringly, betwixt right and wrong, in all, and every of that infinite variety of cases, that ever has, does, or can possibly exist.

4. How far each individual of the human species can, or may in reason and equity be expected, to go in conformity to the immutable laws of rectitude in judgment and in practice, is probably only known to God; and as we cannot know, so we ought not to presume to determine concerning it.

5. How deficient soever we are in the knowledge of nature of each others intellectual abilities, and moral conduct, much more of the abstract nature and perfections of God; yet we are in general, as certain as we are of the existence of such a Being, that he is possessed of every possible perfection, and will not in the least, deviate in his conduct from perfect rectitude.

6. Therefore, if God will require a perfection of God, (if I may express it thus) from his imperfect creatures, but in

the twelve might have been spared, and that the last was the only one that afforded matter of consideration. But this I leave to your consideration, whilst I hasten to inquire into *that* which our author seem'd to intend as a corollary to all the rest, it is this. ---

“ All other means, says he, (besides reason)
 “ for procuring happiness, that either have,
 “ are, or may be deem'd necessary, and
 “ made use of as such, by Jews, Pagans,
 “ Chri-

in proportion to the perfection of their reason, for to produce a rectitude of manners more perfect, or conformable to truth, than they have reason or understanding to direct them to, is impossible.

7. To govern our conduct by our reason, is our duty, and is all God requires of us; and to neglect to regulate our conduct by our reason, in that proportion, which God has been pleas'd to dispense it to us, is criminal, or blameworthy.

8. As there is no individual of our species, but what has been more or less guilty of deviating from the rule prescribed him by his reason, either the whole species are unpardonably guilty before God, or else repentance and reformation are the means of reconciliation with him, and of restoring us to his favour.

9. That repentance and reformation are the natural means of reconciling us to God, when we are conscious of our having offended him, is manifest, from their being invariably recommended to us by our reason on all such occasions, as the means proper for effecting it; for were the case otherwise, they could not be dictated by reason, as a means to that end; because had they not a natural tendency to answer the end, they would be unfit for our use, on account of their insignificance; and to make use of insignificant means, is a preposterous and unwarrantable conduct; and to suppose what is preposterous and unwarrantable, can be the dictate of reason, is absurd and a direct contradiction.

“ Christians, Mahometans, or others, are
 “ unnatural and foreign to the purpose, and
 “ consequently are superfluous and down-
 “ right superstition.”

If our author will give me leave to except two out of the four institutions above mentioned, I will from my soul, join issue with him at once. But can he see no difference in point of value and importance, between the Christian and Jewish dispensation, or *them* and the Heathen and Mahometan schemes of worship. --- A set of words jumbled together into such a confused inconsistent mixture of ideas, can be paralleled only by the celebrated *Bos Fur Sus atq. Sacredos*, in the mouth of every school boy. --- But that our author might not be thought to give the preference, among this medley of dispensations, to that which we call the *Christian*,

10. Therefore to repent of what, upon a cool review of our conduct, appears to be criminal, and to reform it, is a detail of our reason, is what God the author of our Beings requires of us, in order for us to do on our parts, what he knows to be necessary to our happiness.

11. If God requires and directs us by reason and conscience, to perform what he knows is necessary to our happiness, he will certainly do on his part, what he knows is necessary to the end, *viz.* forgive us our sins, and reinstate us in his favour. And if so, then

12. All other means, that either have, are, or may be deemed necessary, and made use of as such, by Jews, Pagans, Christians, Mahometans, or others, are unnatural and foreign to the purpose; and consequently are superfluous and downright superstition.

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he tells you at once, that the "supposed satisfaction for sin, by Christ's death, is a doctrine entirely repugnant to reason, and as such, to be rejected with scorn (p. 41)." Whether it is, or is not an absurd doctrine, it is not my business to enquire, till it can be made clear to me, that the *scriptures* advance that, or any other doctrine in the *absurd* sense, he or some others may, perhaps, *suppose* they do. In the mean time, I would desire it to be considered, that so far only are articles of religion, supposed by *our* church, to be obligatory upon our faith, and no further, than as they consist with the dictates of *right* reason. And therefore let this, or that particular doctrine be enjoined by a *Luther*, a *Calvin*, or even a *Pemle*, as essential to salvation; let the tenets of a *Whitfield*, or a *Wesley*, captivate the giddy minds of the vulgar, and draw them into absurdities, christianity never meant to establish, must all or either of these *irreconcilables*, be made *reconcilable* with right reason, --- or revelation be no more? Must christianity itself be a cheat, because, perhaps, there are those among its several interpreters and expositors, who would cheat men out of their *reason*, in order to palm upon them their own enthusiastic *antichristian* extravaganzas, for sound genuine revelation-tenets? The *Magna Charta* of a christian, is the Bible, with this *peculiar* circum-

circumstance in its favour, that *no power* on earth can claim a *right* to add to or diminish from it. Here then let God and the scriptures be true, and every man--every wrong-headed commentator a liar; nor think that because perhaps some doctrines, *unwarrantably* drawn from scripture, are in reality *superrational* and *supernatural*, that therefore nothing in revelation is either rational or natural.

“ But how, says our author, can revelation be said, or at least proved, to be an aid to human reason, when so many various and even contradictory *interpretations* are put on several great and important passages in it? And how does it appear that those who so much value themselves upon their being possessed of this glorious additional talent, have been so much *aided* in the right use of their natural reason, and lessening the perversion and abuse of it, as might well be expected from the pompous representation and high character that has been given of it? (p. 42, 43.)”

When we talk of revelation as an aid to human reason, we can only mean that it makes (as I have before observed) discoveries which the latter could not of *itself* have attained to; --- and that a collection of writings (containing such a revelation) may have been preserved to us for that purpose, I see no manner of reason to dispute; but that *these* writings

writings should not in some degree share the fate of *others*, and like them be *capable* of being misinterpreted or misapplied by the ignorance, pride and prejudice of some, or the dishonest and disingenuous parts of others, I can see no manner of reason to admit. Nor does this proceed (as says Dr. *Benson*) from a greater obscurity in the sacred writers themselves than there is in other books; but because men of different parts, capacities, skill in languages, parties, sects, read and comment on them, and instead of searching the scriptures in order to find out what is declared in them, they only hunt for evidence in order to justify what they had imbibed or imposed on them."---What wonder then if *such* are "*not aided in the right use of their natural reason, and the lessening the perversion of it, as our author thinks might be expected!*"

"But how comes it to pass, says he, if revelation was intended in fact to restrain men from vice in general, and of consequence those prejudices and partialities above-mentioned, how comes it that such prejudices and prepossessions should yet abound? And why if it was intended to aid men in the right use of their natural reason, and lessening the perversion and abuse of it, has it proved so manifestly insufficient for these ends? (p. 47)"

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If a *guide* to men's actions must necessarily govern them too there might perhaps be some weight in the objection ; tho' the same would lye equally strong against *reason* the deists unerring guide. And in fact so long as we admit the free agency of mankind, no argument can be drawn to the prejudice of revelation from the perverse uses it is put to.

“ But yet, says our author, whoever takes a
 “ view of the christian world, and beholds
 “ the abominable wickedness that has rode
 “ triumphant in it, as well in past as present
 “ times, and observes how the christian religion,
 “ and what is called the christian revelation, has been made a cover and a
 “ pretext to the most base and vile designs,
 “ will see the justness of this reflection, that
 “ if revelation came in aid of reason there
 “ very much needs another revelation to be
 “ given in aid of both. And tho' christians
 “ are apt to boast of the great benefit that has
 “ accrued to mankind by the promulgation
 “ of the christian revelation ; yet it is much
 “ to be question'd whether the poor *Americans*
 “ have not too much reason to consider
 “ the coming of christians, and the christian religion among them to have been the
 “ greatest evil and curse that ever befel them,
 “ and that not only on account of the millions
 “ of people among them who have
 “ fallen a sacrifice to christian piety and
 I “ zeal,

“ zeal, but on account of that perfidiousness
 “ and baseness, and that much greater de-
 “ generacy of action and affection that has
 “ taken place and prevailed among them
 “ since the introduction of christianity. (p.
 “ 48.)” As for the bad *methods* taken to
 establish christianity in *America*, or any other
 part of the world, christianity itself is no more
 answerable for them than *right reason* was for
 the practice among heathens of their offering
 up their sons and their daughters unto devils.
 And consequently our author’s reflection on
 this head is as foreign to his purpose, as were
 any such barbarous practices alluded to, to
 the mild and peaceable intentions of the
 gospel. Proceed we then to some other of
 his notable remarks on Dr. *Benson*.---It is on
 this truly noble declaration of the doctor’s
 that “ reason is the inseparable as well as pe-
 “ culiar glory of every intelligent being.”

“ Reason, says our author, is the idol
 “ the doctor chooses to bow down to,--and I
 much wish our author had not himself offer’d
 incense to a much worse. But let us hear
 what he would say upon the point: “ If
 “ reason, says he, is the inseparable as well
 “ as peculiar glory of every intelligent being,
 “ then it must be a sufficient guide to every
 “ intelligent being in all momentous affairs;
 --- and then, after some of the most re-
 fined *nothingness* I ever read (p. 52.) he
 draws the following conclusions as dedu-
 “ cible

cible from the doctor's account. 1st. That "reason is the glory. 2dly. The inseparable "glory; and 3dly. the peculiar glory of "every intelligent being." And how gloriously he reasons on these separate degrees of glory conferred on human reason will best appear from our author's own words in his 53 and 54 pages; which I would chuse to submit to the reader's observation, (1.)

Whilst

(1) First, if reason be the glory of an intelligent being, it is so because it is that by which alone he is capable of justly arranging his ideas, and perceiving their agreement or disagreement, and thereby of distinguishing betwixt truth and falsehood, good and evil, in all those things in which his duty and happiness are concern'd; and consequently whatever knowledge is useful in these respects it is only to be obtained by the due use of his reason or understanding. *Secondly*, If reason be a glory inseparable from an intelligent being, it could never, at any time, by any means, much less by the transgression of any one individual of the species, have been separated from the whole human race, without sinking the property of intelligence to the species (which is not pretended) Because while any one continues an intelligent being, he must continue to be possessed of every property essential to intelligence; and reason being so specifically essential to it (in that higher sense in which Dr. *Benson* uses the term intelligence) that a being void of reason cannot with any propriety be denominated intelligent: and therefore a being void of reason, that is, void of a capacity of ratiocination, which will enable him to perceive the connection or repugnance of his own ideas, when under a proper arrangement, and to draw just and natural conclusions from their proper premisses; such a being cannot be accountable for the use or abuse of a faculty which he has not, nor will God expect the performance of duties proper to intelligent beings at such a one's hands. *Thirdly*, If reason be the peculiar glory of every intelligent being, then it must be the peculiar glory of the first principle of life and intelligence. And hence it evidently

whilst I pass on to another remark on the doctor. " Reason was not designed, says
 " the doctor, like our cloaths, to be put on
 " and off at pleasure, but it was intended
 " for constant and perpetual use; and which
 " we ought to make use of, not only in the
 " affairs of this life, but much more in re-
 " ligious affairs, which are of the highest im-
 " portance. " But alas, alas, says our author,
 " it is a certain tho' melancholy truth, tho'
 " reason was not design'd like our cloaths
 " to be put on and off at pleasure; yet that
 " *some* of our sanguine divines, like labourers
 " in summer, throw off their cloaths the
 " better to perform the task assigned them;
 " they cast off their reason the better to
 " reproach and *vilify* their innocent neigh-
 " bours for not blindly submitting to their
 " duties (p. 55.)" Had our author in re-
 turn but luckily put *on* his reason in examin-
 ing into the grounds of revelation, he neither
 would have minded nor merited their
 revilings. And if, whilst he so studiously
 avoided splitting on the rock of enthusiasm
 and superstition, he had not struck on the
 sands of blasphemy and prophaneness, but

follows, that if reason be the peculiar glory of the Creator,
 then it must be the peculiar glory of the creature, in the re-
 spective proportionate degree in which he possessed it; and
 that nothing which he is or can be possessed of besides, can,
 abstractedly considered, be equal, much less of superior glory
 to him.

steer'd

steer'd judiciously between the two extremes, *be* would have made a much safer and more reputable passage through life. If others have deduced from christianity doctrines christianity never meant to establish, their weakness or wickedness *be* to themselves. But will that lessen *his* guilt in not attending with proper deference to the declarations it *really* makes? If God has thought fit to propose to our faith a system of truths truly rational and becoming, right worthy the Creator to establish, and his creatures to embrace and reverence (and *be* it an unquestionable truth that he has not, or our author himself unquestionably throws aside his reason in rejecting revelation) must these important truths be overlooked, because others perhaps have annexed to them absurdities and extravagancies of their own *framing*? Must the original dispensation be despised because it has at times suffered the abuses of priestcraft and enthusiasm? And what if some call it a promulgation of the law of nature, and others a superadded revelation? What if sometimes it is one and sometimes it is the other, which our author, with a sneer, observes to be the case (p. 55) does this, I would ask, make revelation not revelation? There is something in brutes that determines them to their *good* unaccountably, and enables them, with great sagacity, to provide for their safety and self-

preservation.----Some call it instinct; some reason, some a divine impulse.--Sometimes it is one, and sometimes it is the other.--But what then? Shall we dispute the fact, that there is something equivalent to an intelligent principle in brutes--because we want a name by which to distinguish it from the reason of *man*. The end in short proposed by an institution (not the *name* by which it is called, no nor the bad *uses* it is put to) must alone determine a rational man to approve or reject it. And if revelation was intended to promote the practice of true religion, it matters not by what particular name you dignify or distinguish it. It is sufficient (in negative duty I mean) if you do not disown, dishonour, or deride it.--But to return----

“ Dr. *Benson* asserts, that the more the
 “ works of creation and providence are
 “ searched into and understood, the more
 “ they confirm the truth of the christian religion; and add such supports and evidences as could hardly be expected or believed. (p. 151)” Our author’s remark on this passage is so very disingenuous and dishonest, that I scarce can have patience to bestow any notice on it; and yet I know not how, after all, to pass it over in silence.

“ If, says he, the consideration of the
 “ works of the creation must enable us to
 “ draw *such* conclusions from them, as give

“ a proper proof of the divinity of the doc-
 “ trine of the *trinity*, the *hypostatic* union,
 “ and all such other *supernatural* doctrines
 “ and precepts, as constitute the christian
 “ religion, properly so called, it can work
 “ wonders indeed; to which, says he, I may
 “ add the doctrine of *transubstantiation*, the
 “ truth and divinity of which is as proveable
 “ from the works of creation as the others.
 “ And if reason is sufficient for these things,
 “ then what is it not sufficient for? (p. 58).”

If our author had been so just to Dr. *Ben-*
son as to have given his words a fair introduc-
 tion, and not disjoin'd them from the main
 argument he was upon, the inference he has
 drawn from them would have been too gla-
 ringly inconclusive for the most hasty reader
 not to take notice of it; so that he very mo-
 destly waves doing the *former* the better to
 disguise his cunning craftiness in the latter.
 “ Dr. *Benson* having previously observed,
 “ that those profound searches into the cause
 “ of things, and the formation of the world,
 “ made by such great men as Dr. *Clark* and
 “ Dr. *Durham*, and Mr. *Ray*, &c. had added
 “ strength to the more common arguments
 “ brought in support of religion, adds--that
 “ the more the works of creation and pro-
 “ vidence are searched into and understood,
 “ the more they confirm the truth of the
 “ christian religion; and add such supports

“ and evidences as could hardly be expected
 “ or believed. If so, says our author, they
 “ must necessarily prove the doctrine of the
 “ *trinity, byposstatic union, transubstantiation,*
 “ or the like ; and if reason is sufficient for
 “ these things, what is it not sufficient for ? ”

Why, it is not sufficient to make a man
honest who is *determined* to be a knave---Ex-
 cuse the warmth of the reply, which I am
 provok'd to by our author's scandalous sub-
 terfuge. The doctor's design, in the passages
 above quoted was, to shew how learned men
 might and had answer'd objections and dif-
 ficulties started by unbelievers ; “ by leading
 “ them into arguments of a more abstract
 “ speculative kind ; such as the creation of
 “ the world, the eternal fitness of things,
 “ moral differences of actions, moral obli-
 “ gations and the like, the former of which
 “ being more distinctly explain'd and ex-
 “ piated on by the help of revelation, and
 “ the latter shewn so entirely to coincide
 “ with the end of Christ's coming, served,
 “ as he very justly apprehended to furnish
 “ out such additional supports for the truths
 “ of christianity, as could hardly have been
 “ imagined by men not attentive to such re-
 “ flections.” How our author therefore can
 be justified in his laboured *conclusion* from
 the above passages concerning the doctrine
 of

of the *trinity*, the *hypostatic* union, or the like, I leave only to common sense and common *honesty* to determine.

In page 59, our author quotes as follows from Dr. *Benson*. "As the gospel, says the doctor, (p. 233) was a matter of pure revelation, St. *Paul* was in the right of it; not to mix his human learning with it; but faithfully to preach the gospel in that purity and simplicity in which he had received it from Christ. Our author's conclusion from which words is, that natural philosophy or human learning cannot be exercised about it without corrupting and defiling it; and that therefore the doctor had gone beyond himself, and has carried the matter too far. (p. *ibid.*)

Whether the doctor or our author is guilty of the mistake of going beyond himself, and carrying the matter too far, I will appeal to the judgment of the reader on what follows. "If, says our author, reason is capable of drawing such conclusions from the works of creation and providence in favour of christianity as aforesaid, then St. *Paul*; not using it to answer that purpose, must render him not commendable, but on the contrary greatly blameable. For when he went from place to place preaching the gospel at *Thessalonica*, at *Berea* and elsewhere, nothing could have been more proper,

“ proper, nor was better adapted to answer
 “ the purpose of his ministry, viz. the
 “ working conviction and the conversion of
 “ his hearers, than for him to have exempli-
 “ fied his human wisdom and skill in natural
 “ philosophy, by drawing those conclusions
 “ and thereby producing those evidences from
 “ the works of creation and providence as
 “ proved the truth and divinity of what he
 “ exhibited to his respective evidences. (p.
 “ 60, 61.)” If our author had not stopt
 short in his quotation from Dr. *Benson*, he
 could have found no reason for this objection ;
 it being most solidly obviated by the doctor’s
 own words immediately subjoin’d. “ As the
 “ gospel, says the doctor, was a matter of
 “ pure revelation, St. *Paul* was in the right
 “ of it not to mix his human learning with
 “ it, &c. For, when he could work mi-
 “ racles, and enable others to work miracles,
 “ he had a much shorter and more effectual
 “ method of making converts and establish-
 “ ing them in the faith, than from any thing
 “ he had learned in the school of *Tarsus*, or
 “ at the feet of *Gamaliel* in *Jerusalem*. In
 “ renouncing his *human* learning he did not
 “ renounce common sense. But human
 “ learning could be of no service to an
 “ apostle to make him master of the gospel,
 “ or to enable him to work miracles, tho’ it
 “ may

“ may be of great service to *us* if it be made
 “ right use of, p. 234.)”

The Apostles, says Dr. *Benson* again (p.
 221.) “ the Apostles took quite another Me-
 “ thod to prove the truth of christianity.
 “ They did indeed, make their appeals to
 “ men’s understanding, but in a different way
 “ from modern apologists ? — being endued
 “ with readier, and more decisive means of
 “ conviction, more suitable to the apostolic
 “ character, to the bulk of mankind, and
 “ to their own necessary course of dispatch.
 “ They grounded christianity upon facts,
 “ they wrought miracles before the faces of
 “ their hearers, in proof of a divine com-
 “ mission ; and then confer’d upon the con-
 “ verts miraculous powers ; these were im-
 “ mediate appeals to mens senses, and what
 “ the lowest of the people could judge of,
 “ and reason from.” --- What is this but
 dealing with mankind, suitably to their in-
 telligent nature ? (which our author affects to
 urge the necessity of p. 61.) What is this but
 making “ an appeal to their understanding,
 “ requiring their assent in a proper way, and
 “ binding them with the cords of a man ?
 “ p. *ib.*)”

But again, Dr. *Benson* says, (p. 27.) “ Are
 “ not the moral virtues, (which are the
 “ principal things in christianity) the very
 “ things which all true philosophers have ever
 “ attempted

" attempted to recommend? Can any thing
 " be more worthy of God, then giving men
 " such a revelation, when men had confessed-
 " ly corrupted themselves, and that to such
 " a degree, that not only reason or the light
 " of nature, was altogether unlikely to re-
 " store true piety, but even that light itself,
 " as *Tully* expressly acknowledged, did no
 " where appear." And then its being urged
 by the author of christianity, whom he was
 then answering, that when christianity ap-
 peared, it was an enquiring age he answers,
 (p. 134.) " Suppose we allow it, as we rea-
 " dily do? What then? What would he in-
 " fer from that? The gospel spread in that
 " enquiring age, when as he asserts, reason
 " was in the highest request and reputation,
 " and spread with most amazing swiftness."--
 Now comes the most bare-faced misrepresen-
 tation of a man's argument, that a writer
 can become capable of exhibiting.---" The
 " Dr. says our author, has averr'd, that the
 " gospel is a matter of pure revelation, and
 " also, that the principal things in christiani-
 " ty, are the very things, which all true phi-
 " losophy has ever attempted to recommend.
 " Again he informs us, that the world was
 " in that profound darkness, when christia-
 " nity first made its appearance in it, that
 " reason or the light of nature did no where
 " appear; and yet he informs us, it every
 " where

“ where shone forth in that remarkably happy age, with such resplendency and lustre, that reason was in the highest request and reputation.” Good God, says he, is such confusion possible!

Such a heavy charge of confusion and contradiction, so *confidently* brought by our author, against Dr. *Benson*, was, I doubt not, greedily swallowed by all the admirers of the former; and served to exalt beyond the reach of suspicion and misgivings, his most profound sagacity and penetration.

And yet what more or less does it amount to, than a fresh display of his usual dexterity, in the exercise of his profession, as a dealer in sophistry and misquotations, which he artfully gilds over with a few gewgaw expressions, in order to dazzle the eyes, whilst he is playing upon, and misleading the *understandings* of his reasons. -- He cannot perceive, how the gospel can be a pure revelation, and yet contain things, which every philosopher has attempted to recommend! Had the Dr. said, that the gospel contains those things *only*, which every philosopher attempts to recommend; there might, perhaps, have been some foundation for our author's critical dissatisfaction and astonishment. But what if besides those duties of christianity, which christians and philosophers have *united* in recommending, there are some *superadded*

peradded duties more especially to be regarded, as motives to the practice of the *moral* precepts, which are the *principal* objects of every divine institution whatever? Had our author vouchsafed to have interpreted the Dr, in this fair, intelligible and rational sense, he might, in some degree, have saved his own reputation as a reasoner, whilst he is thus fruitlessly endeavouring to pull down the *envied* merit of Dr. *Benson*. But hold, say you, — Your Friend the Dr. is not to get clear'd from the charge of absurdity and confusion, so easily as you imagine. For, says our author, *He* informs us, that the world was in that profound ignorance, when christianity first made its appearance in it, that reason, or the light of nature did nowhere *appear* ; -- and yet *he* informs us, that it every where shone, &c. He! Who? What the Doctor? Why truly, no. --- But our author, finding that the Dr. could not become absurd of himself, and without *his* assistance, very charitably helps him out with a few words of his own, so artfully slid in, that he imagined (such being the high compliment he would pay to the understanding of his admirers) they might easily pass for the Dr's. own words. If you refer to the Dr. in p. 134, you will find, he is only arguing from *this* concession, which for argument sake he had a mind to allow the *author of*
cbri-

christianity not founded, &c. viz. That when christianity first appeared, it was an enquiring age. And what, says the Dr. would *he* infer from that concession? The gospel spread in that enquiring age, when as *he* inserts, (who asserts? Does the Dr. assert it? Is *he* not evidently talking of the assertion of the author of christianity not founded, &c. --- Shameful!) reason was in the highest request and reputation, tho' he before had declared, it did no where appear. Is such a *groundless* charge of confusion in Dr. Benson possible! Is it possible, in short, that a man can boast being actuated by the *religion of reason and nature*, and be so shamefully deficient of moral *honesty* in his writings. Or is it possible, that *you*, my friend, should sacrifice your reason, to an implicit faith, in so presumptuous, so prevaricating a *dictator*! But to proceed.

In answer to the Dr's. observation, that reason is of constant and perpetual use in all things concerning Christianity in particular; our author asks, "Where is the man that durst, " on the principles of pure reason, attempt " to prove, so as to convince the understand- " ing of another man, that an unoriginated, " uncompounded, immaterial, and pure spi- " rit, should, *like* one of the derived, com- " pounded, material, human species, have " a son? (p. 66.) And I in return, ask where

is

" is the Christian, &c. that believes, or would establish, such a doctrine?---viz. that such an unoriginated, &c. being has a *son like*, or begotten after the *manner* of one of the derived, compounded, material, human species? I would gladly know from what corner of the world, from what synod, or council, or established creed, has our author picked up that secret? what cabinet council has he been admitted to?---But I will not enlarge on this point, till I have considered another charge brought against the Dr. as a *trifler*.---

" When some of those doctrines that are peculiarly Christian were brought on the carpet, and it became the Dr's. present business in his answer to the author of Christianity not founded on argument, to shew or prove them to be all reasonable, he instead of that only asks, says our Author, are not all these things highly reasonable? and there he stops short with this excuse.---he forbore to enlarge, for fear he should seem tedious, which his not having done, proves that his book is all waste paper." (p. 66.) --- so that in order to avoid wasting pen, ink, and paper, you must it seems trifle with your readers all you can---must amuse them at all events, tho' it be even with words no way *necessary* to the purpose.

The point which our author thinks the Dr. *ought* to have *enlarged* upon, he thinks not at all to his *purpose*; but *because* he has not done so, all he has wrote on that head is waste paper. This is a conclusion which our author had an eye to as of consequence, I presume, to himself, well considering that if talking not at all to the purpose would preserve a book from the scurvy fate of waste paper, his own famous work would stand as fair a chance for immortality as any book whatsoever. But the argument against the Dr. is --- that when he asked whether all the doctrines of revelation were not reasonable, he did not take upon him to prove to our *Deists* that they were so.

The internal evidences of the truth of Christianity are these says the Dr. (p. 21, 22.) *viz.* --- “ *that both the doctrines and Precepts* “ of Christianity (if we take the scriptural “ account of them) are highly wise and rea- “ sonable; that there is only one God; that “ he is a pure spirit, and consequently in- “ visible; that he has almighty power, infi- “ nite knowledge and unerring wisdom, that “ he is eternal and immortal; and that (in “ one word) he is every way perfect; --- that “ this great being created the world, and “ continually presides over it; supporting “ and preserving it in that order and regu- “ larity which we behold; --- that he is not
K only

“ only the governor of all intelligent beings,
 “ but takes care of all the smallest and in-
 “ ferior creatures, and that none of them are
 “ below his notice, or thought unworthy
 “ of his constant regard ;---that he created
 “ man in his own *image* ; and that, when
 “ mankind degenerated into ignorance, ido-
 “ latry, and vice, he sent among them, his
 “ only-begotten and well-beloved son, a per-
 “ son of great eminence and dignity ; that,
 “ by his own bright example, and most fa-
 “ miliar and excellent instructions, he might
 “ recover the world to the knowledge of the
 “ true God, and the practice of everlasting
 “ righteousness; that the Son of God, when
 “ he with this view, appeared among men,
 “ chose a state of poverty, self-denial, and
 “ mortification to this world, neither seeking
 “ riches, temporal dominions, or sensual plea-
 “ sures ; but kept free from all suspicion of
 “ such low and ignoble views ; --- that, not-
 “ withstanding the great opposition he met
 “ with, from the ignorance and prejudice,
 “ the malice and wickedness of mankind, he
 “ unweariedly went about doing good, and
 “ rather submitted to sacrifice his life, than
 “ deny, or betray, such important truths as
 “ he had delivered ; (for, surely, no possible
 “ condescension could be too great, to pro-
 “ mote the moral virtue and happiness of in-
 “ telligent creatures, and recover a fallen
 “ race !)

“ race !) that this great and eminent person
 “ was in a most remarkable manner, reward-
 “ ed for his extraordinary humiliation and
 “ sufferings, (which was honouring, and re-
 “ warding virtue itself, in the most virtuous
 “ person that ever appeared among men, and
 “ thereby in the strongest manner, encourag-
 “ ing us to be virtuous ; --- that, as by him
 “ God made the worlds, so by him he now
 “ governs all things ; --- that he will, at last,
 “ by him raise the dead, and confer re-
 “ wards and punishments upon men, ac-
 “ cording as they have behaved ; and then he
 “ adds, Are not all these things in them-
 “ selves highly reasonable ?”

Now all that the Dr. could have enlarged
 upon, or added to the bare *mention* of those
 doctrines, as objects of christian faith, must
 have been this, *viz.* that the abounding in
 arguments, to prove the reasonableness of
 these doctrines, must be tedious (because un-
 necessary) to men, not *determin'd* to raise
 disputes, and to those that are *so* disposed,
 it must to be as tedious and unnecessary, be-
 cause not probable, nor even possible to work
 conviction. But again. Our author agree-
 ing with the Dr. that we are to judge of the
 nature and evidence, of what is proposed to
 us, under the notion of a divine *revelation*,
 (p. 72.) immediately subjoins, --- “ well I
 “ may safely depend on reason to guide me

“right in *this case*, may I not ? Surprising,
 “adds he, no such matter ! Reason, after all,
 “is by no means singly to be consider’d, it
 “is not the only guide in *matters* of religion,
 “but reason and scripture are both to be re-
 “garded, (p. 73.)” Now here we have ano-
 ther instance of our author’s honesty, in point
 of interpretation. “Surely, says he, this
 “method of vindicating the divine authori-
 “ty, of all the parts of scripture severally,
 “and the same parts conjunctively, as a par-
 “ticular and special revelation from heaven,
 “cannot in reason be expected, should be
 “attended with the proposed effect, *viz.* the
 “conviction of deists of its truth, by fair
 “reasoning ; because this, as I conceive, is a
 “fair plain contradiction (p. 73.). But tho’ I
 “differ from Dr. *Benson*, says he, where he
 “does not agree with himself ? yet I have the
 “pleasure of agreeing with him elsewhere,
 “*viz.* when he is *pleased* to assert the rights
 “and abilities of reason, and consistently to
 “prove and maintain them, as in the follow-
 “ing sentences.”

Was there ever seen such an insolent, in-
 sulting piece of grimace ! If our author was
 really desirous to agree with the Dr. where he
 appears to be *consistent*, how comes he to take
 so much pleasure in perverting the latter’s
 meaning, (as in the above passage he has so
 notoriously done) to make him *inconsistent* ?

But

But this was a piece of artifice, our author, I presume, thought it necessary to make use of, in order to appear *himself* (*qualis ab incepto*) consistently sophistical and trifling.

“ By our reason, says the Doctor, we are
 “ to make trial of what is offered to us as a
 “ revelation from God, otherwise how
 “ should one distinguish between the Koran
 “ of *Mahomet* and the bible? By our reason
 “ we are to judge of the nature and evidence
 “ of what is proposed to us under the no-
 “ tion of a divine revelation; that we may
 “ carefully distinguish the true revelation
 “ from all pretended and false ones. In the
 “ use of our reason and understanding we
 “ are to study that revelation, and find out
 “ the scope and connection, and the mean-
 “ ing of the words and sentences, that we
 “ may know what is reveal’d and what it
 “ contains. For where there is no idea there
 “ can be no assent; because that would be
 “ assenting to nothing; and assenting to no-
 “ thing is the same as not assenting at all.
 “ Our assent can reach no farther than our
 “ ideas of what we are to receive; nor pro-
 “ perly rise higher than the proofs or evi-
 “ dences upon which we are to yield our
 “ assent.---Reason then, says our author, is
 “ the test all revelation must be tried by,
 “ whether it be the Koran of *Mahomet*, or
 “ the Bible of Christians, in order carefully

“ to distinguish true revelation from all
 “ pretended and false ones. I will, there-
 “ fore, says he, apply Dr. *Benson's* reason-
 “ ing in favour of reason, and the use of it
 “ in religious and reveal'd matters, to the
 “ christian doctrines mentioned above, *viz.*
 “ that God has a begotten son. And if God
 “ begat one son, then why not an infinite
 “ race of *infinite* beings? (p. 77.)” I grant
 the query to be just, did the scriptures, did
 any synod or council, did any the most en-
 thusiastic commentator advance the absurdity
 our author here supposes. If it appears not
 in the creed of *Athanasius* where will our
 author hope to have it established? And what
 does he say?---The son is of the father alone,
 not made nor created (not made and created
 in the same manner the sons of men are
 made and created) but begotten or sent into
 being in a manner which we may possibly
 form an idea of *then* (and not till then) when
 we are made capable of conceiving the man-
 ner in which God acts and brings into being
 ---which *Lactantius* tells us cannot be re-
 lated or known by any one. (1) If the lan-
 guage of men whose property it is to convey
 such ideas, and such only as they are capable
 of attaining to, falls short of expressing the

(1) Quomodo igitur procreavit? Primum nesciri a quoquam
 possunt, nec narrari opera divina, &c. Lactant. De vero
 Sap. & Rel. p. 184.

existence

existence and operations of beings, not lying within the reach of human conception, why must we necessarily affix to words *most* expressive of our meaning when applied to beings, incomprehensible in their nature, their most gross and common acceptation? But, says our author, "as certain as a being of perfect rectitude has given a revelation, so certain is it that not any thing in that revelation can be found on a strict enquiry to remain unrevealed; that is, not understood by men of learning, penetration, diligence and industry. To suppose, says he, what is thus enquired into may yet remain unreveal'd carries with it such a reflection either upon the natural or moral character of the deity, as implies a want of ability or inclination to inform his creatures of what he directly proposed to inform them of (p. 83.)" What! does the not revealing things God had not an *inclination* to instruct men in, prove his want of ability, or inclination, to give them *any* extraordinary communication of his will? What God has thought fit not to reveal to us, can only be resolved into his want of inclination. But does that want of inclination, to open to us every *circumstance* in a revelation which we could wish for, prove that he has made *no* revelation? If it does not, our author is here again, empty, impertinent, if

not blasphemous. Let him prove to us, that he has not revealed, in the gospel, sufficient to reduce rational and considerate beings to an obedience to the religion of *reason* and *nature*, and I may join him, perhaps, in his scheme of infidelity.

“ But, again, our author says (p. 85, 86.)
 “ the nature and propriety of things would
 “ surely be allowed, by christians, to be a
 “ proper standard for a Mahometan to frame
 “ the decisions of his reason, and form a
 “ judgment on the Koran by, and he would,
 “ of himself, be capable of clearly perceiving,
 “ by his own understanding, what is proper
 “ for him, and what he ought to do under
 “ such circumstances. Now, Mahometans
 “ and Christians, as creatures of the same
 “ species, and, as intelligent rational beings,
 “ are on a level ; they stand in the same re-
 “ lation to God, are alike his offspring, and
 “ the objects of his care and protection, they
 “ have a principle of discernment, and a rule
 “ of judgment, which is common to all, and
 “ if either, or both of those parties should
 “ say, that the particular revelation each one
 “ is in possession of, was kindly intended to
 “ be a general benefit, and for the greatest
 “ good of all ; then what substantial reason
 “ can there be assigned, why that kind hand
 “ of providence, which gave it forth, and has
 “ put it into the possession of some, does not
 “ alike

“alike exert itself, and put it into the hands
 “of all, that so all may share in those bene-
 “fits which were thus kindly intended for
 “them.” (p. 87.)

With an answer to this query, I think to conclude my remarks on our author. In order to which I must desire you to recollect what is advanced on this head in (p. 60.) and to make all the proper allowances for the present want of the universality of revelation, which the nature of the case requires. Is it necessary that God, at the same time that he proposes to mankind a right rational scheme for their perfect happiness, should *force* their acceptance of it? And is it reasonable, that Men should charge that upon God, which is alone chargeable on themselves? Will you not consider, how, from the very beginning of the world, the several kingdoms of it have united in nothing so much as in a gradual opposition to the known will of their creator? ---And when right reason might, perhaps, have been alone sufficient for their duty and their happiness, that they immediately declined paying any the least regard to either?

Mankind, in short, are too universally abandoned to sentiments and pernicious practices, which revelation would dispossess them of. But wherefore, let me ask, are they not better minded? And why are not men, in general,

neral, as sollicitous in *propagating* truth, as they are assiduous in *opposing* it : Why does the policy of temporal kingdoms prevail over the proffered interest of that which is to come ? Some still sit in darkness, wherefore then do not men *unite* in giving them light ? Is it because *some* receive a political benefit from such their unhappy darkness ? But how base then, and ungenerous is it, to charge it to the account of God's providence, and make it a pretence to accuse him of partiality ? How the ignorance and various mistakes, in point of religion, in the several nations of the world, began to prevail at first, it is impossible for us, at this distance, from the rise of kingdoms, minutely to discover. It is sufficient, that they will, e'er long, have an end. Of this we have reasonable expectations from the sure word of prophecy.—When, as our Saviour declares, the *gospel shall be preached to all the world, and all kingdoms shall fall down before him, and all nations shall do him service.*—*When the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea, Hab. ii. 14. When they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, know the Lord ; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord, Jer. xxxi. 34.*

In that day it shall come to pass (says the prophet Isaiah) in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it; and many people shall go and say, come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths, and he shall judge among the nations, and rebuke many people, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nations shall rise against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

“ This, says Mr. Carrington in his ingenious and very useful discourses on the articles of the Christian Faith, this is evidently, says he, one of those numerous Prophecies which relate to the absolute *universality* of Christ's kingdom, the two distinguishing characteristics of which are *righteousness* and *peace*; which, it were absurd to say, have at any interval of time, as yet so *kissed each other* as to come up to those strong, nervous, and pathetic terms, in which that glorious state is every where, and on all occasions, delineated. Alas! says he, all hitherto has worn a very different face; the conflux of the nations has been rather to destroy, to overwhelm, than to enlarge the church. The *work of righteousness* hath been seldom peace, and
its

its effect much oftner *misery* and *sorrow*, than *quietness* and *perpetual assurance*. It is evident that we have as yet seen but the faint drawings of that *dominion* which is to extend *from sea to sea*, and *from the river unto the ends of the earth*. By much the larger moiety of the world hath hitherto lived either exempt from this law, or in a state of rebellion and disobedience to it; and the distinguishing privileges of the subjects of Christ have yet been little else but hatred, ignominy, misery, persecution, and martyrdom. But this is by no means such a kingdom as was ever promised to the royal *branch* of the house of *David*. Either then the prophets have greatly exaggerated the thing in their description; either the picture is drawn much stronger than life (which is not at all consistent either with the genius of the holy writings, or the justice and veracity of God) or there yet remains an higher dispensation, a brighter kingdom, a far more illustrious kingdom, a far more illustrious period of the Church's glory, than she hath as yet been suffered to enjoy (1). And as the Deists are themselves some of those very *scoffers* which we were *taught to expect*, and contribute not a little towards compleating a former prophecy of the present too extensive re-

(1) Vid. *Carrington's* discourses on the articles of the Creed, 2d edit. p. 244, 245.

jection of Christianity, so do they afford a proportionally strong foundation for that more comfortable hope and expectation, --- *that he that dwelleth in heaven will, at last laugh them to scorn --- that the Lord shall have them in derision --- that he will set his king on his holy hill of Sion --- will give him the heathen for his inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for his possession.*

And now, my friend, it is high time that we take leave of our author, upon whom, if in any degree I have been *severe* in my remarks, I have not, I hope, been *unjust*: And if whilst I have detected, or endeavoured to detect, the sophistry of a *false* friend to the *religion* of reason and nature, (who would separate it from the religion of Jesus Christ) I have in some measure secured your friendship to the *latter*, and convinced you that it is founded on the principles of the *former*, my purpose is answered, and I shall think my time and pains not entirely misemployed.

I am,

DEAR SIR,

Your sincere Friend, &c.

Capel Berrow.

F I N I S.

